



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FEDERAL-STATE JOINT BOARD AGREES: UNIVERSAL SERVICE PROGRAMS NEED TO BETTER SERVE LOW-INCOME PARTICIPANTS AND SUPPORT BROADBAND

Washington, D.C. – State and federal officials today agreed to recommend a package of reforms to improve participation in the Lifeline and Link Up programs.

Lifeline and Link Up are two components of the Universal Service Fund's Low-Income program, which helps reduce the cost of phone service and phone installation for families that are eligible for food stamps and similar programs.

Earlier this year, the FCC asked the [Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service](#) for recommendations on how to improve the program given changes that include increasing migration to wireless service and the increased importance of broadband. The FCC also asked the Joint Board for suggestions regarding the most effective approaches to addressing potential waste, fraud, and abuse in the program while also improving its efficiency and reach.

The Joint Board recommended that the FCC:

- Encourage automatic enrollment, triggered when low-income families sign up for other benefits, such as food stamps.
- Adopt minimum standards for states and carriers to use to verify a participant's eligibility, with stricter standards allowed, in order to prevent potential waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Seek comment on establishing a centralized national database for certification and verification of eligibility to eliminate duplicative claims and speed enrollment, and address potential waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Adopt outreach rules for carriers that participate in Lifeline.
- Seek comment on increasing eligibility for the program by allowing households earning 150% or less of the federal poverty guidelines to participate, up from the current 135%.

The Joint Board also urged the Federal Communications Commission to adopt a principle that the Universal Service Fund should be used to support networks providing both voice and broadband, consistent with the FCC's National Broadband Plan. All of the Joint Board's recommendations will be evaluated by the FCC as it works to improve Lifeline and Link Up and reviews recommendations in the National Broadband Plan to use universal service to help advance broadband to all Americans.

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More information about the Federal-State Board on Universal Service can be found at http://www.fcc.gov/wcb/tapd/universal_service/JointBoard/.