



MEMORANDUM

Date: April 16, 2021

Notes from Docket 20-747 Lifeline Advertising Workshop

Carriers Participating:

Jean Pauk, MTA/TDS	Joan Swartz, Polar Comm
Eric Engler, Park Region	Jim Canaan, Interstate Telco
Jason Topp, CenturyLink Lumen	Josh Netland, Emily Telco
John Kroger, Coop Regulatory Manager	Donna Getter, Gardonville Telco
Melanie Nelson, Halstad Telephone Company	Donna Theil, Red River Comm
Tom Campbell, Arrowhead Electric Coop	Amy Schonborn, BEVCOMM
Scott Bohler, Frontier	Amy Olson
Pauleen Hinkley, Halstad Telco	Andrea Livingston, Midco
David Bickett, Park Region	Cynthia Sweet, Harmony/Citizens
Jenna Lovgren, Red River Comm	Greg Springer, CTC
Christie Turn, Paul Bunyan Rural Telephone	Erica Kruegen, Winnebago Coop
Carrie Kern – Taggert, Wikstrom	Nancy Vogel, Midco
Kent Hedstrom, Runestone Telcom	Ron Elwood, Legal Aid
Mark Klinkhammer, Garden Valley Tech	Rachel Laudenbach, ARVIG
Randy Kiesel, Regulated	Rosanna Tse, T-Mobile
William Haas, T-Mobile	Sandra
Brent Christensen, MTA	Grace Boehm, Assurance
Mackenzie Wildung, Federated	Geri Salmela, West Central Telephone
Brian Bissonette, Paul Bunyan	Andy Isackson, CTC
Tim Brinkman, Garden Valley	Linda
Donna Euele, Federated Telco, Farmers Telco	Marie Roberts
Andy Carlson, T-Mobile, Assurance	

PUC Representatives:

Sally Anne McShane
Erin Petschel

DEED Representatives:

Angie Dickison
Diane Wells

DOC Representatives:

Joy Gullikson
Greg Doyle
Diane Dietz
Bruce Linscheid

OAG Representative:

Kristin Berkland

Introduction of Participants

This workshop had a great turn out. There were 59-61 participants for the duration.

Presentation from Sally Anne McShane of the MPUC

Sally Anne explained the Docket 20-8 Commission Order that opened Docket 20-747 to investigate high-cost ETC offerings of Lifeline services including but not limited to issues relating to advertising and outreach. A Notice of Comment Period was opened in Docket 20-747 that asked High Cost ETCs to file comments about their advertising and outreach best practices. Further, the Notice mentioned hosting this workshop to discuss the information filed in the initial and reply comment periods, best practices, and proposing next steps.

Presentation from Mark Klinkhammer of Garden Valley Telco

Mark Klinkhammer talked about all the avenues taken by Garden Valley to make people aware of Lifeline discounts. Garden Valley sends a newsletter six times a year to all box holders, not just customers. A letter is sent out to existing customers. Garden Valley is making internet service more available to low-income customers. The goal is to keep people connected to others and aware of current events to avoid isolation during the pandemic while considering social distancing measures. New customers get a welcome packet with a brochure describing telephone assistance. During Lifeline Awareness Week, Garden Valley banner does a media splash, including a banner on their website. Garden Valley offers a discount where students who receive free or reduced-price lunch can get a discount on their internet service, Students First. The program ends in May, and they are hoping to not need the program in September 2021.

Presentation from Brent Christensen of Christensen Communications

Brent Christiansen said that their telco is much smaller than Garden Valley's subscribership, and they do not have a marketing department. Brent discussed the evolution of the Lifeline program. They have no formal Students First-style program but offered free internet service to all students during the pandemic. Brent explains the shrinking number of subscribers and why the numbers may be changing. They make an unofficial outreach push and really try to get all Lifeline customers recertified.

Group Discussion / Wrap-up

Participants got the chance to ask questions of each other and speak about the most effective outreach methods:

- Do billboard and bill inserts work? Most people responded with, No, they are not seeing evidence of this.
- Brochures that go to social service offices seem to be effective, but that is also dependent on which county a person is in and which agency they can work with.
- Many subscribers already have the Lifeline discount on their cell phone, and it is a bigger bang for their buck. Many people are not applying the discount to landline. There is more reliance on cell service, so the Lifeline credit is usually on a person's wireless service, not their landline service.
- Tracking subscribers and what got them to sign up for Lifeline is hard. There is no good data. An actual conversation with people seems to be more effective in getting people signed up.
- Are multiple exchanges related to the population of an area? Companies are not able to identify exchanges that have a greater participation in Lifeline.
- Are agencies being more receptive to working with a Lifeline provider? The Minnesota Department of Human Services used to inform telephone companies of who qualifies for the Lifeline program. Now it is on the shoulders of the telco providers.
- Service providers cannot sign the customer up for the program anymore. A company may send the customer is sent to the library to sign up. That could be a contributing factor of the drop off in numbers.
- Sometimes, the issue is finding the right person at USAC for help in signing up. Kristin agreed to investigate this barrier.
- Wikstrom has a lot of people that utilize the Lifeline discount on their landline service. The RAD ID is a barrier. Carrie went through process just to see if it works. Also, it is frustrating for customers to call back the provider to say they are accepted. Social services are not able to help people sign up, so people are sent back to the provider. Customers are trying hard to stay on and get the credit. Senior citizens are the ones that are the hardest to keep on the program. Wikstrom is now just crediting the customers themselves and not getting the USAC fee back at the telco level.
- The way it is set up right now, the National Verifier system doesn't work for the consumer. USAC can create administrative procedures that work with the FCC.
- Kristin Berkland will try to get USAC to do a presentation for this group. Kristin Berkland used to work at USAC and will ask USAC to set a meeting date for more information about Lifeline and getting guidance with the service provider portal and RAD ID portal.