



Case No: GNR-T-19-04 and GNR-T-19-03

Order No: 34284 and 34285

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Commission suspends ITSAP surcharge, leaves unchanged TRS assessment

BOISE (April 4, 2019) – State regulators have suspended a surcharge that helps low-income Idahoans maintain access to local dial-tone service for medical and other emergencies.

It's the third consecutive year the Idaho Public Utilities Commission has [suspended the surcharge](#) used to fund the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program (ITSAP), which provides qualified applicants with a monthly discount of \$2.50 for landline and cell phone service.

The Commission determines the surcharge annually, while the state Department of Health and Welfare administers the program.

To be eligible for ITSAP assistance, the applicant must be the head of a household and meet eligibility criteria determined by the Department of Health and Welfare.

In addition to ITSAP, a federal program, [Lifeline](#), provides \$9.25 per month to help qualifying low-income residents access phone and broadband service.

The number of Idaho residents receiving financial assistance through ITSAP has fallen significantly in recent years, from an average of 27,539 per month in 2010 to an average of 1,787 per month in 2018. From 2017 to 2018, the number of recipients dropped 30 percent.

As participation has declined, so has the amount of the monthly surcharge, from 13 cents for each line in 1998, to 3 cents in 2014. The Commission lowered it to 1 cent in 2016, and has suspended the surcharge every year since then.

As a result, Idaho residents will not see the surcharge on their phone bills in 2019.

In a related case, the [Commission decided](#) to also leave unchanged the funding mechanisms for the Idaho Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), which assists individuals with hearing and speech impairments.

TRS allows those individuals to use telephones via a relay center that converts, or relays, oral conversations to text-type, and vice versa. The relay center also provides speech-to-speech, Spanish-to-Spanish, video and Internet relay services.

TRS is funded by an assessment on residential and business lines of 2 cents per month, in addition to a charge on intrastate long-distance calls \$0.0002 per minute.

Use of the service is declining due to cell-phone texting and the availability of similar Internet-based services.

In 2018, the relay center handled 10,698 minutes of traffic, a 12-percent decrease from calendar year 2017.

All documents filed in these cases, including the Commission's orders, can be found at www.puc.idaho.gov. Click on "Open Cases" under the "Telecom" heading and scroll down to case number [GNR-T-19-03](#) for the TRS case and [GNR-T-19-04](#) for the ITSAP case.