



Idaho Public Utilities Commission

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Brad Little, Governor

Paul Kjellander, Commissioner

Kristine Raper, Commissioner

Eric Anderson, Commissioner

Case No. GNR-T-20-10
Order No. 34613

Case No. GNR-T-20-09
Order No. 34615

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Commission approves annual reports, budgets for telecommunications programs that assist Idaho residents

BOISE (April 24, 2020) - The Idaho Public Utilities Commission has approved the 2019 reports and this year's budgets for the state's Telecommunications Relay Service and the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program.

The Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) program allows those who are hearing, or speech impaired, to participate in telephone communications "in a manner functionally equivalent to that of individuals without hearing or speech impairments." The Idaho TRS service provider is Hamilton Telecommunications. Hamilton operates the relay center where verbal conversations are converted or "relayed" to text-type and vice versa. The relay center also provides speech-to-speech, Spanish-to-Spanish, video, and Internet relay services.

The program is supported by assessments on local telephone (residential and business) lines and on billed intrastate long-distance minutes.

The service's report for 2019 offers information on the amount of calls handled in minutes, expenses, and information on revenues and allocations. In addition to approving the report for 2019 and the budget for 2020, the commission approved an increase in the charges the relay service relies on in order to operate. The line charge will be raised from \$0.02 cents per line to \$0.03 cents, and the MTS/WATS minute rate from \$0.0002 per minute to \$0.0008 per minute effective May 1, 2020.

The increase in the line charge and MTS/WATS minute rate does not apply to cell phone or Internet service. The surcharge is paid by telephone companies. Idaho code does not allow companies to pass the surcharge on to their customers.

To view the commission's order approving the report for 2019 and the 2020 budget, please visit: https://puc.idaho.gov/Fileroom/PublicFiles/TELE/GNR/GNRT2009/OrdNotc/20200403Final_Order_No_34615.pdf.

The commission also approved the annual report for 2019 and this year's budget for the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program. The program helps decrease the cost of basic local telephone service for eligible Idaho residents, and is funded through a uniform, commission-ordered surcharge on all end-user business, residential, and wireless access service lines. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare administers the service assistance program along with federal programs to grant limited federal contributions to low-income customers.

Idaho telephone companies provide a monthly \$2.50 discount to eligible applicants. If the commission has designated a company as an eligible telecommunications carrier, the company may be reimbursed from the program's fund for assistance provided.

The program's 2019 annual report offered information on the number of customers participating, how much telecommunications companies received in reimbursements and the number of wireless access lines, among other information.

To establish the 2020 budget, the program's administrator estimated that 445,466 access lines per month would be subject to the surcharge while the average number of program recipients would decrease to 1,557 per month. Based on this data, the administrator projected the program's funding requirement for 2020 would be \$67,397, and the program's end-of-year balance would be \$1,100,602 in its fund. In 2019, the program saw a significant drop in the number of credit recipients. Because of this, the administrator for the program is recommending that a surcharge rate be suspended for another year. The administrator said the fund balance will be more than enough to reimburse companies for assistance credits provided while maintaining an adequate balance for unexpected expenses.

To view the commission's order approving the 2019 report and budget for 2020, please visit: <https://puc.idaho.gov/FileRoom/PublicFiles/telecom/34613.pdf>.