



Idaho Public Utilities Commission

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Case No. GNR-T-24-03
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NEWS RELEASE: Commission accepts annual report, budget for telecommunications program that assists Idaho residents.

BOISE (May 16, 2024) – The Idaho Public Utilities Commission has accepted the 2023 annual report and the 2024 budget for the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program, which helps decrease the cost of basic local exchange telephone service for eligible Idaho residents.

The program 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 program along with federal programs to grant limited federal “lifeline” contributions to low-income customers. The lifeline program is designed to ensure all Americans have the opportunities that phone service provides, including being able to connect to jobs, family and emergency services.

Idaho telephone companies provide a monthly \$2.50 discount to eligible applicants. If the public utilities commission designates a company as an eligible telecommunications carrier, the company may be reimbursed from the program’s fund for the assistance it provided to its customers.

The program’s administrator, Kathleen Toohill, submitted a report for 2023 showing a 10 percent decrease in local access lines, a 37 percent decrease in wireless access lines and a 16 percent increase in the program’s credit recipients from the previous year. The administrator also reported the gross surcharge revenue for 2023 was \$0 because a surcharge remained suspended.

The average number of reported recipients for the program was 7,777 per month in 2023. This represents a monthly increase of about 1,000 recipients compared to 2022. Telecommunications companies received \$233,313 in disbursements for program credits paid to eligible recipients in 2023, compared to \$201,731 in 2022.

The administrator estimated funding requirements for 2024 will increase for the first time in years as several new companies have been authorized to participate in the program. The administrator estimated eligible companies will receive \$233,310 in program reimbursements, and that the administrator’s expenses will be \$45,441.

The administrator also projected another significant increase in credit recipients during 2024. With the increased participation, the administrator recommended that a surcharge rate not be suspended for an additional year and that the surcharge rate be reinstated at a rate of \$0.07 per access line. The administrator also noted that the fund decreased from \$603,650.78 to \$334,811.90 during 2023 when the surcharge rate continued to be suspended.

The commission determined a surcharge rate of \$0.05 per access line will be sufficient to maintain a \$200,000 minimum 2024 year-end balance for the program.

Additional information is available at puc.idaho.gov/case/Details/7270.