



A REPORT TO THE
Governor
President of the Senate
Speaker of the House of Representatives

FLORIDA

LIFELINE

ASSISTANCE

Number of Customers
Subscribing to Lifeline Service
and the Effectiveness of
Procedures to Promote Participation

DECEMBER 2014

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List of Acronyms

CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DCF	Department of Children and Families
ETC	Eligible Telecommunications Carrier
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FPSC	Florida Public Service Commission
NCPW	National Consumer Protection Week
NLAD	National Lifeline Accountability Database
OPC	Office of Public Counsel
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps)
TCA	Temporary Cash Assistance
USAC	Universal Service Administrative Company

I. Executive Summary

The Florida Lifeline program is part of the federal Universal Service Program designed to enable low-income households to obtain and maintain basic local telephone service in accordance with Section 364.10, Florida Statutes. The Lifeline program offers qualifying households a minimum \$9.25 discount on their monthly phone bills, or a free Lifeline cell phone and monthly minutes from certain wireless providers. This report presents Lifeline participation data for the July 2013 through June 2014 program year, and evaluates procedures put in place to strengthen and streamline the Lifeline program.

As of June 30, 2014, 957,792 eligible households participated in the Florida Lifeline program, which equates to approximately one of every eight Florida households. Lifeline assistance participation includes the involvement of the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC), the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Florida Office of Public Counsel (OPC), the Florida Department of Education (DOE) and other state agencies that provide benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline service.¹

Approximately 50% of all Lifeline-eligible Florida households are receiving Lifeline assistance. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) continues to be the largest qualifying program for Lifeline assistance in Florida. Based upon June 2014 SNAP participants, the Lifeline eligible households² decreased by 1.2 percent compared to 2013 data, which may reflect the improving Florida economy.

The Faces of Lifeline was the slogan for Florida's 2014 Lifeline Awareness Week, September 8-14. In addition to increasing awareness among eligible citizens, this year's Lifeline Awareness Week also aimed to educate residents about the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule. This rule allows one Lifeline benefit per eligible household and requires eligible citizens to annually recertify to continue the benefit.

The Commission continues to focus on enrollment process issues as a means of increasing participation. Specific enrollment process initiatives include the following:

- FPSC Lifeline Coordinated Online Application Process
- FPSC/DCF Coordinated Lifeline Enrollment
- Annual Recertification Procedures
- DCF Certification/Verification Web Services Interface
- Lifeline Work Group Meetings

¹ Section 364.10(2)(g)1, Florida Statutes, requires each state agency that provides benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline service to undertake, in cooperation with the DCF, the Department of Education, the FPSC, the OPC, and ETCs providing Lifeline services, the development of procedures to promote Lifeline participation.

² According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Report, "*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Number Of Households Participating, ending June 30, 2014,*" over 1,930,106 Florida households participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. See Figure 2.

II. Background

Each year, the FPSC is required to report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the number of customers subscribing to Lifeline service and the effectiveness of procedures to promote participation in the program. This report is prepared pursuant to the requirements contained in Section 364.10, Florida Statutes.

In Florida, if an applicant uses the electronic Lifeline Coordinated Enrollment Process³ to apply for Lifeline, the process will confirm if the applicant is currently participating in the Medicaid, SNAP or Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)⁴ programs. If a program other than Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA, is used for certification, the customer must provide documentation of participation from the administering agency, which could be the Florida Department of Education (free school lunch program), the Social Security Administration (Supplemental Security Income), a county-level agency (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Plan or Section Eight Housing), or the Bureau of Indian Affairs for documentation. Current data shows that over ninety-five percent of Florida applicants using the Lifeline Coordinated Enrollment Process use Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA for eligibility.

If a Lifeline applicant chooses to apply for Lifeline directly with an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC), the ETC can access the DCF web services⁵ to confirm program participation for Medicaid, SNAP, and TCA. In Florida, certification and verification can be accomplished using this process if the applicant or existing Lifeline customer participates in the Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA programs which are administered by the DCF.

The National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD), which is maintained by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC),⁶ is designed to help carriers identify and resolve duplicate claims for Lifeline Program supported service and prevent future duplicates. This database provides a means for carriers to check, on a real-time and nationwide basis, if the household is already receiving a Lifeline Program supported service. USAC activated the National Lifeline Accountability Database for Florida Lifeline participants on March 6, 2014.

The FCC Lifeline Reform Order also called for the creation of a national eligibility database for certification and program participation verification of Lifeline applicants.⁷

³ The electronic Lifeline coordinated enrollment process was set up by the FPSC and DCF to allow an applicant for Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA to request and receive Lifeline assistance after approved for the DCF program.

⁴ Nationally known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

⁵ The Web services interface allows Florida ETCs a secure gateway into the DCF computer to verify that a Lifeline customer is participating in the Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA programs administered by DCF. The ETC enters the person's first and last name, date of birth, and last four digits of the person's social security number. The DCF computer responds as to whether the person currently participates in one of the DCF programs without identifying the program because of confidentiality. An ETC must pre-register with DCF to use the Web services interface to ensure security is maintained.

⁶ The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation designated by the Federal Communications Commission as the administrator of the Universal Service Fund. USAC collects contributions from telecommunications carriers and administers support programs designed to help communities across the country secure access to affordable telecommunications services.

⁷ A single nationwide database will be deployed and the physical infrastructure, connections, and all related components will be located in a single location (or several locations to establish sufficient redundancy).

III. Lifeline Participation

Currently, FCC rules allow a \$9.25 maximum reimbursement from the USAC to a participating Lifeline carrier. The additional tier of support, available only to eligible subscribers living on tribal lands, provides a credit up to \$25.00 per month.

Florida Transitional Lifeline Assistance requires that ETCs offer former Lifeline customers, who are no longer eligible, a 30 percent discount off the residential basic local service rate. The customers are eligible to receive the discount for one year from the date the customer ceases to be qualified for Lifeline.⁸

Program-Based

Eligibility for Lifeline in Florida can be determined by customer enrollment in any one of the following programs:⁹

- Food Assistance (SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- Supplement Security Income
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)
- National School Lunch Program - Free Lunch
- Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs: Tribal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Head Start Subsidy and National School Lunch Program

Income-Based

In addition to the program-based criteria, customers with annual incomes up to 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines may be eligible to participate in the Florida Lifeline program. Section 364.10(2)(a), Florida Statutes, provides that each local exchange telecommunications company that has more than one million access lines and is an ETC shall provide Lifeline service to citizens who meet an income eligibility test of up to 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services updated the 2014 Federal Poverty Guidelines, as shown in Attachment A.¹⁰ The OPC certifies customer eligibility under the income test for customers requesting to be enrolled in the Lifeline program for the three major companies designated as ETCs. The OPC also performs income certification for wireless ETCs who have filed a notice of election to do so with the FPSC.¹¹

The number of subscribers enrolled in Lifeline was 957,792 as of June 30, 2014, a 4.3 percent increase from the number of subscribers last year. Figure 1 shows the number of

⁸ Section 364.105, Florida Statutes.

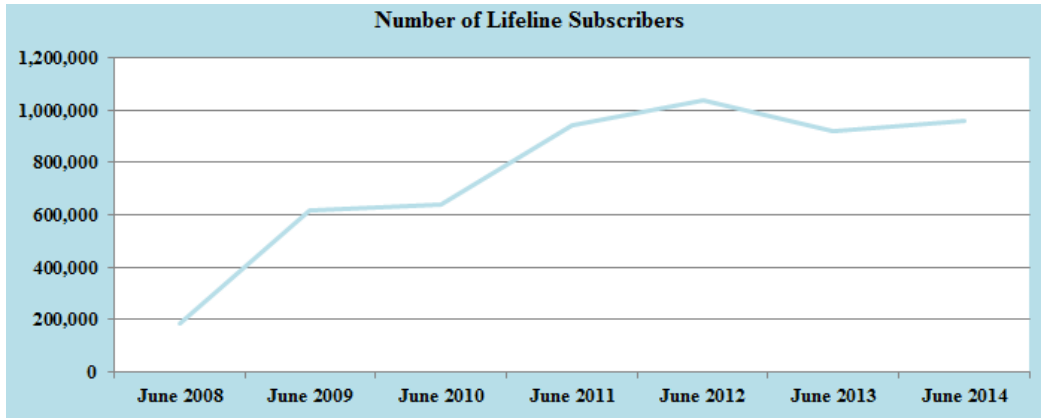
⁹ Rule 25-4.0665(1) and (2), Florida Administrative Code.

¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services, Annual Update of the Department of Health and Human Service Poverty Guidelines. See Federal Register Notice, January 22, 2014.

¹¹ See Section 364.10(2)(a), Florida Statutes.

Lifeline subscribers from June 2008 through 2014. In 2013, the decrease in subscribership was largely attributable to the new FCC rules which require annual recertification of every subscriber receiving Lifeline credits. Many customers failed to respond to the ETCs' recertification requests and were removed from the program.

Figure 1. Florida Lifeline Subscribership



Source: Industry responses to FPSC data requests (2008-14)

In 2014, there was an increase in subscribership of 39,547 households, or 4.3 percent. Lifeline eligible households decreased by 22,784 or 1.2 percent compared to 2013. The participation rate grew to 49.6 percent, an increase of 2.6 percentage points, or 5.5 percent over the 47.0 percent participation rate for the previous year. This may reflect an improving Florida economy. Considering the number of households which are eligible to receive Lifeline in Florida and the current participation rate, these numbers demonstrate the continued need for the Lifeline program. Figure 2 shows participation rates in Florida households from June 2011 through June 2014.

Figure 2. Lifeline Participation Rate In Eligible Florida Households for 2011-2014

Year	Lifeline Enrollment	Eligible Households	% Participation Rate
June 2011	943,854	1,690,512	55.8%
June 2012	1,035,858	1,864,183	55.6%
June 2013	918,245	1,952,890	47.0%
June 2014	957,792	1,930,106	49.6%

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture data figures are as of June 2014

IV. Lifeline Providers

Section 54.201(b) of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) allows state commissions to designate a common carrier that meets certain requirements as an ETC¹² in a non-rural service area. The CFR also allows state commissions to designate one or more common carriers as an ETC in a rural service area.¹³ The FPSC has determined that before designating a carrier as an ETC, it should make an affirmative determination that such designation is in the public interest, regardless of whether the applicant seeks designation in an area served by a rural or non-rural carrier.¹⁴

To qualify as an ETC, a common carrier must offer services that are supported by federal universal service support mechanisms, either using its own facilities or a combination of its own facilities and another carrier's resold service,¹⁵ and the carrier must advertise the availability of such services and charges. Additionally, a company applying and qualifying for designation as an ETC must demonstrate good management and legitimate business practices to successfully administer the Lifeline program.

In 2011, the FCC took a technology neutral approach and determined that ETCs can use any platform to provide voice service. Figure 3 shows the twenty-two companies which had ETC status and participated in the Lifeline Program in Florida as of June 30, 2014.¹⁶

¹² Florida House Bill 1231, the Florida 2011 Legislature, removed the FPSC authority to designate ETC wireless telecommunication providers. Effective July 1, 2012, wireless providers must directly apply for Florida ETC designation with the FCC.

¹³ A state commission also has the authority to rescind the ETC status of any ETC designated by it that does not follow the requirements of the Lifeline Assistance program.

¹⁴ See Docket No. 100124-TX, In RE: Petition for designation as eligible telecommunications carrier by Sun-Tel USA, Inc., Order No. PSC-10-0634-PAA-TX, issued October 25, 2010.

¹⁵ Those services supported by Universal Service include the following: (1) voice grade access to the public switched network or its functional equivalent, (2) minutes of use for local service provided at no additional charge to end users, (3) toll limitation to qualifying low-income consumers, and (4) access to the emergency services 911 and enhanced 911 services to the extent the local government in an eligible carrier's service area has implemented 911 or enhanced 911 systems. However, the FCC started phasing down toll limitation service reimbursement in 2012 and completely eliminated it effective January 1, 2014.

¹⁶ By Order No. PSC-13-0547-PAA-TX, issued October 29, 2013, the FPSC approved Unity Telecom, LLC's request for relinquishment of its ETC designation. By Order No. PSC-14-0144-PAA-TX, issued March 31, 2014, the FPSC approved Express Phone Service, Inc.'s request for relinquishment of its ETC designation.

Figure 3. ETCs Participating in Florida Lifeline Program

Florida Companies Designated as ETCs	
AT&T Florida (AT&T)	Budget Phone
Cox Florida Telecom, LP	CenturyLink
FLATEL, Inc.	Frontier Communications
Global Connection Inc.	FairPoint Communications
Access Wireless	ITS Telecommunications
Knology of Florida, Inc.	Nexus Communications, Inc.
NEFCOM	Quincy Telephone Company
Smart City Telecom	Sun-Tel USA, Inc.
T-Mobile Wireless	Tele Circuit Corporation
SafeLink Wireless	Verizon Florida, LLC
Assurance Wireless	Windstream Florida, Inc.

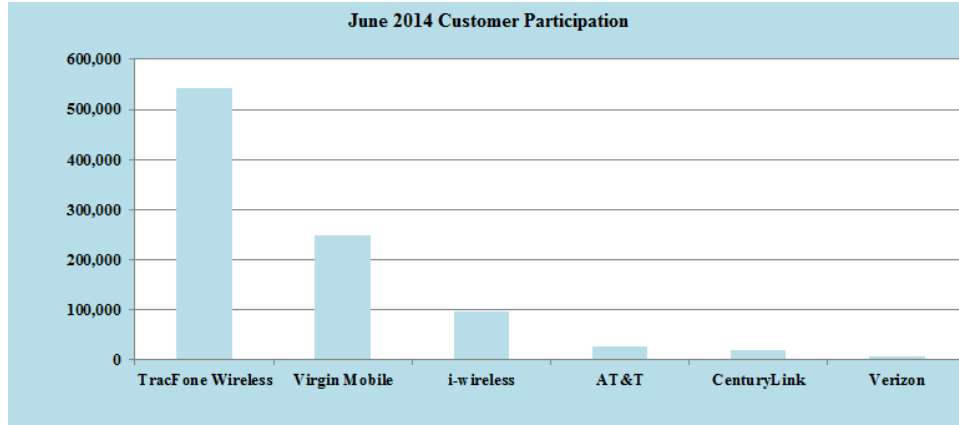
As of July 1, 2011, the FPSC no longer has authority to designate wireless ETCs in the State of Florida. Wireless ETC applications for Florida are now filed directly with the FCC. Figure 4 shows the 34 Florida ETC Wireless petitions pending at the FCC.

Figure 4. Companies with Pending ETC Designation Petitions at FCC as of June 2014

ETC Petitions Pending at FCC	
Airvoice Wireless	American Broadband
Amerimex	Assist Wireless
Blue Jay Wireless	Boomerang Wireless
Budget PrePay, Inc.	Cintex Wireless
Consumer Cellular	EZ Reach Mobile
FedLink Wireless	ZING PCS
Free Mobile	Global Connection
Kajeet	Linkup Telecom
LTS of Rocky Mount	Millennium 2000
Mobile Net POSA	Nexus Communications
Platinum Tel	Odin Wireless
Q Link Wireless	TAG Mobile
TNT Wireless	Tele Circuit Network
AmTel	Telrite
Tempo Telecom	TerraCom
Total Call Mobile	True Wireless
Vast Communications'	You Talk Mobile

Figure 5 shows the six Florida ETCs with the largest number of Lifeline customers in June 2014, which represents 98.7 percent of the total Lifeline customer participation.

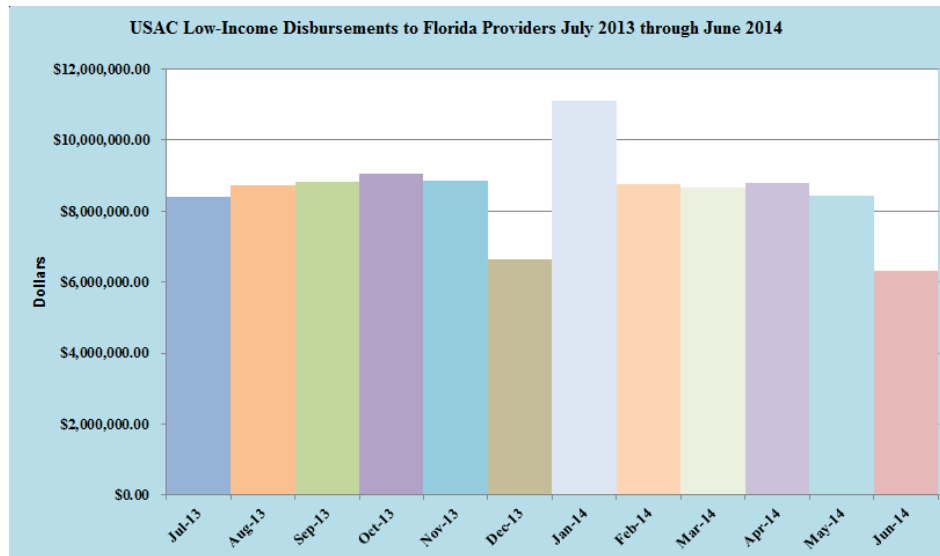
Figure 5. Six Florida ETCs with the Largest Number of Lifeline Customers in June 2014



Source: Industry responses to 2014 FPSC data requests

Figure 6 reflects the USAC Lifeline disbursements to Florida for the 12-month period ending June 2014, totaling \$107,537,790, an average of \$8,961,483 per month over the period. These dollars enabled Florida citizens qualifying for Lifeline benefits to receive discounted monthly bills with a current minimum credit of \$9.25, or a free Lifeline wireless phone with up to 250 free monthly minutes from certain wireless providers.

Figure 6. USAC Low Income ETC Disbursements to Florida Providers



Source: USAC Disbursements Florida June 2013-2014¹⁷

¹⁷ The Figure 6 fluctuations in the months of December 2013 and January 2014 were caused by Assurance Wireless' filing dates for Lifeline credit reimbursement from the universal service fund.

As of June 30, 2014, the total Lifeline enrollment in Florida was 957,792 households. Florida had a 4.31 net percentage increase in enrollment as of June 30, 2014, over the previous year. Attachment B represents the historic enrollment figures for the Lifeline program listed by each of the ETCs.

V. Lifeline Enrollment Process and Improvement Activities

A. Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment Process

Implementation of the electronic Lifeline Coordinated Enrollment Process has been a major success. The FPSC began formally tracking the number of Lifeline applications filed via the Lifeline Coordinated Enrollment Process in April 1, 2007. Cumulative Lifeline coordinated enrollment applications as of June 30, 2014, totaled 650,825 over the seven year period.

The coordinated enrollment process requires a DCF client to indicate an interest in receiving the Lifeline discount. The applicant then identifies a telephone service provider from a drop-down box on the application and answers applicable questions. Once a client is determined to be eligible for Medicaid, SNAP, or TCA, DCF will forward the necessary information for Lifeline enrollment to the FPSC. The FPSC places this information on a secure Web site for retrieval by the appropriate ETC.

All ETCs are required to enroll the subscriber in the Lifeline program as soon as possible, but no later than 60 days from the receipt of the FPSC's e-mail notification. In addition, the ETC is required to credit the subscriber's bill for Lifeline service as of the date the ETC received the FPSC's e-mail notification.¹⁸

ETCs are required to provide the FPSC the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and the date of the application for any misdirected applications; any applications for customers currently receiving Lifeline service; or any rejected applicants, including the reason(s) the applicants were rejected. FPSC staff then sends letters to the rejected applicants if the company they named on the application as providing their telephone service does not have them listed as a current customer, or if DCF could not confirm their current participation in one of their qualifying programs. FPSC staff includes a new application with the letter along with staff contact information if they need assistance with the application process.

B. Transitional Lifeline

In accordance with Section 364.105, Florida Statutes, current Lifeline customers who no longer meet eligibility criteria and are removed from Lifeline service are eligible to receive a 30 percent discount on the residential basic local service rate for a period of one year after ending Lifeline service. For example, a former Lifeline customer with a phone bill that includes a \$25.00 basic rate would receive a \$7.50 monthly discount for one year. Transitioning from Lifeline service means that the consumer's socio-economic status may have improved, and the customer may have advanced beyond the qualifying eligibility criteria.

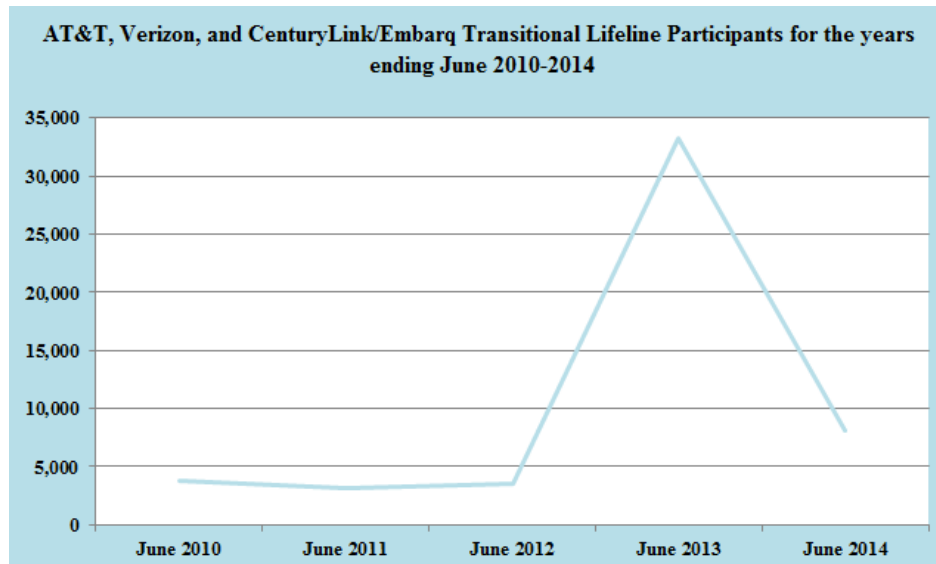
Figure 7 presents the number of Transitional Lifeline customers for AT&T, Verizon, and CenturyLink for June 2010 through June 2014. The large increase in the number of Transitional Lifeline participants in 2013¹⁹ is attributable to customers being de-enrolled from the Florida Lifeline program due to the new FCC requirement to annually recertify Lifeline customers.

¹⁸ See Rule 25-4.0665(10)(b), Florida Administrative Code.

¹⁹ In 2013, AT&T reported 32,783; CenturyLink reported 488; and Verizon reported 23. In 2014, AT&T reported 4,921; CenturyLink reported 566; and Verizon reported 2,550.

These former Lifeline participants may elect to receive Transitional Lifeline benefits for up to one year.

Figure 7. AT&T, Verizon, and CenturyLink Transitional Lifeline Participants 2010-2014



Source: Industry responses to FPSC data requests (2010-2014)

Several actions by the FPSC and FCC occurred during the July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 period. A discussion of these initiatives is presented below.

C. Florida Public Service Commission Activities

1. Lifeline Work Group Met December 2013

The Lifeline Work Group was created by Section 364.10(2)(g)3, Florida Statutes, and includes the FPSC, DCF, OPC, and each Florida ETC offering Lifeline service. Its purpose is to determine how the eligible Lifeline subscriber information will be shared, the obligations of each party with respect to the use of that information, and the procedures to be implemented to increase enrollment and verify eligibility in these programs.

FPSC staff conducted a meeting of the Lifeline Work Group on December 5, 2013. The purpose of this meeting was for the Lifeline Work Group to discuss:

- a. The DCF Web Services Interface which verifies participation in the Medicaid, SNAP, and TCA for Lifeline verification, and new federal rules regarding state databases.
- b. The status of the FCC Temporary Waiver for Florida of the FCC rules which require state agencies that make the initial determination of a subscriber's eligibility for Lifeline to provide each ETC with a hard-copy of each of the Lifeline certification forms.

- c. Determine how each Florida ETC will perform the required 2013 Lifeline customer recertification required by the FCC.
- d. Solicit ideas to further streamline the Lifeline enrollment process for both the applicant and ETC.

2. FPSC Continued Actions to Prevent Waste, Fraud and Abuse of the Federal Universal Service Fund

In 2013-2014, Florida continued enforcing safeguards to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of the Universal Service Fund. Florida's leadership in implementing and administering the National ETC State Coordinating Group to monitor prospective and existing ETCs across the country, has enabled information sharing with all states²⁰ on a national basis. Protecting against waste, fraud, and abuse in the Lifeline program is contingent upon developing adequate safeguards to ensure that funds are being disbursed and expended according to state and federal regulations and guidelines. The FPSC monitors monthly federal universal service funds disbursed to ETCs operating in Florida to determine the number of Lifeline participants in Florida by month.

The FPSC strives to protect the integrity of the Lifeline program in the State of Florida and takes appropriate enforcement action when necessary. The FPSC has statutory authority to grant landline ETC designations, and can also revoke ETC status when warranted. Unlawful and inappropriate federal Universal Service Fund disbursements are inconsistent with public trust and negatively impacts states like Florida, which contribute more into the Universal Service Fund than it receives. Florida continues to be commended by the FCC for its continued and formidable efforts to identify and eliminate fraud in the Lifeline Assistance program and Universal Service Fund.

3. FCC Requirement to Provide Hard-Copy Certifications of Lifeline Applicants to ETCs

FCC Order 12-11 stated that ETCs must not seek reimbursement from the federal Universal Service Fund unless the ETC has received from the state Lifeline administrator or other state agency, a copy of the Lifeline subscriber's certification form.²¹ The Order also required state Lifeline administrators or other state agencies that are responsible for the initial determination of a subscriber's eligibility for Lifeline to provide each ETC with a hard-copy of each of the Lifeline certification forms.²²

The United States Telecom Association (US Telecom) filed for and received three consecutive waivers of this requirement on behalf of states, which included Florida, through February 1, 2014. The US Telecom Waiver Request granted August 30, 2013,²³ states that "...if an ETC or state believes that it will be unable to come into compliance and seeks a permanent

²⁰ The ETC State Coordinating group includes state commission members from all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

²¹ 47 C.F.R. §54.410(b)(2)(ii), 47 C.F.R. §54.410(c)(2)(ii), and 47 C.F.R. §54.407(d)

²² 47 C.F.R. §54.410(e)

²³ In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket No. 11-42, DA 13-1853, released August 30, 2013.

waiver from the rules, it must provide in its request for permanent relief an explanation for why such relief is appropriate.”

Florida has put in place a streamlined, efficient, and verifiable Lifeline Electronic Coordinated Enrollment process that does not have the capability or necessity of printing out a hard-copy Lifeline application. This advanced process involves a computer interface between the FPSC and the DCF for Lifeline applicants who currently participate in the Medicaid, the SNAP, or the TCA program. The Florida process eliminates the need to require or maintain hard-copy Lifeline certification applications.

On October 25, 2013, the FPSC filed a petition with the FCC providing a status update and request for a permanent waiver of the requirement to provide hard-copy certifications to ETCs. On June 6, 2014, the FCC released Order DA 14-785, granting Florida a permanent waiver of the FCC requirements to provide hard-copy Lifeline applications to eligible telecommunications carriers. In the Order, the FCC stated a permanent waiver is appropriate because Florida’s screening system fulfills the underlying purpose of the rules to limit Lifeline benefits to eligible consumers.

4. Comments FPSC Filed with the FCC Addressing the Waiver of Certain Lifeline Rules for the Benefit of Those Individuals Participating in State-Administered Address Confidentiality Programs

On November 21, 2013, the FCC released a Public Notice (DA 13-2240) seeking comment on waiving certain Lifeline rules for the benefit of those individuals participating in state-administered Address Confidentiality Programs. Address Confidentiality Programs protect victims of domestic violence by allowing them to use a substitute mailing address rather than their physical home address. On December 17, 2013, the FPSC submitted comments in response to the FCC’s Public Notice and encouraged the FCC to consider the following:

- a. The FCC should waive the rule limiting the use of P.O. Boxes as residential addresses, to allow qualifying, low-income consumers who participate in state-administered Address Confidentiality Programs to receive Lifeline service.
- b. In Florida, Eligible Telecommunications Carriers should accept a Florida Address Confidentiality Program authorization card as proof of Address Confidentiality Program enrollment.
- c. The FCC should waive the requirement for Address Confidentiality Program participants to fill out a one per household worksheet.

During 2013, there were 108,030 cases of domestic violence reported to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Developing a process for Address Confidentiality Program participants to enroll in Lifeline while protecting their physical address is vital.

D. Federal Communications Commission Activities

1. 2013 Recertification of Florida Lifeline Subscribers

The FCC adopted a set of uniform recertification procedures that all ETCs must perform annually to verify the ongoing eligibility of their Lifeline subscribers.²⁴ To comply with the annual requirement for 2013, all ETCs and state Lifeline administrators were required to recertify the eligibility of their Lifeline subscriber base by the end of 2013, and report the results to USAC by January 31, 2014. Subscribers failing to respond to recertification efforts had to be de-enrolled from Lifeline. As a result of the 2013 recertification process, 350,817 customers or 34.05 percent were de-enrolled from the Florida Lifeline program.

ETCs have the option of recertifying subscribers in one of two ways. The first is to verify program or income-based eligibility where an ETC can query the available database to confirm the subscriber's continued eligibility. In the absence of a database, the ETC must recertify the continued eligibility of a subscriber by writing, phone, text message, e-mail, Interactive Voice Response, or otherwise through the Internet using an electronic signature. If an ETC is unable to recertify a subscriber, the subscriber is offered transitional Lifeline benefits at a 30 percent discount of the local telecommunications service rate for one year.²⁵

2. 2014 Recertification of Florida Lifeline Subscribers

As explained in the requirements for Lifeline recertification, subscribers failing to respond to recertification efforts must be de-enrolled from Lifeline. The number of subscribers claimed by Florida ETCs in February 2014 was 825,046, and the number of subscribers not responding for recertification was 154,348. The number of subscribers who responded that they are no longer eligible for Lifeline benefits was 217. As a result of the 2014 recertification process, 154,565 customers or 18.73 percent were de-enrolled from the Florida Lifeline program.²⁶ Results of the recertification by company are presented in Attachment C.

3. Duplicate Lifeline Support

Eligible consumers can only receive one Lifeline-supported service per household.²⁷ If there are two households residing at one address and each desire to participate in Lifeline, each applicant would have to complete a one-per-household worksheet to demonstrate that each applicant is living in a separate economic unit and not sharing living expenses (bills, food, etc.) or income with another resident.²⁸

²⁴ See Order FCC 12-11, 27 FCC Rcd at 6714-22, paras. 129-148; 47 C.F.R. § 54.410(f).

²⁵ Section 364.105, Florida Statutes, Discounted rate for basic service for former Lifeline subscribers.

²⁶ Numbers recorded by ETCs on FCC Form 555, Annual Lifeline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Certification Form.

²⁷ See *id.*, 27 FCC Rcd at 6689, para. 74. The one-per-household rule is codified at 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(c). See 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(c). This rule became effective June 1, 2012. See Lifeline Reform Order, 27 FCC Rcd at 6859-60, para. 515; 77 FR 12952 (March 2, 2012), corrected by 77 FR 19125 (Mar. 30, 2012).

²⁸ A household Lifeline eligibility pre-screening tool is available at www.lifelinesupport.org.

By Order FCC 12-11, the FCC directed USAC to establish a database to both eliminate existing duplicative support and prevent duplicative support in the future. To prevent waste in the Universal Service Fund, the FCC created and mandated the use by ETCs of a National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) to ensure that multiple ETCs do not seek and receive reimbursement for the same Lifeline subscriber.

The NLAD conducts a nationwide real-time check to determine if the consumer or another person at the address of the consumer, is already receiving a Lifeline Program-supported service. The NLAD can only be effective if ETCs provide to the NLAD the following information for each new and existing Lifeline subscriber.

- The subscriber's full name
- Full residential address
- Date of birth
- Last four digits of the subscriber's Social Security number or Tribal Identification number, if the subscriber is a member of a Tribal nation and does not have a Social Security number
- The telephone number associated with the Lifeline service
- The date on which the Lifeline service was initiated
- The date on which the Lifeline service was terminated, if it has been terminated
- The amount of support being sought for that subscriber, and
- The means through which the subscriber qualified for Lifeline

After December 2013, ETCs must provide information for existing Lifeline subscribers to the NLAD by state, and for new subscribers upon initiation of service. The NLAD transitioned states to its database on a state-by-state basis. Florida ETCs were operational on the NLAD starting March 6, 2014.

4. AT&T TDM-to-IP Transition

On November 7, 2012, AT&T filed a petition asking the FCC to allow incumbent local exchange carriers to retire their existing Time-Division Multiplexing (TDM) services in select exchanges and introduce all-IP services in their place. On January 31, 2014, the FCC invited interested providers to submit detailed proposals to test real-world applications of planned changes in technology likely to have tangible effects on consumers. AT&T submitted its proposal to the FCC on February 27, 2014, to conduct the trials in a rural wire center in Carbon Hill, AL, and in a suburban wire center in Palm Beach County, FL (Kings Point).

AT&T proposes to conduct the trials in three phases: phase one will have customers opt for new services voluntarily, phase two will grandfather TDM-based services, and phase three will sunset all TDM-based services in these exchanges and require customers to migrate to IP-based products. Within AT&T's wireline and wireless footprints, it will offer consumers and businesses wireline and wireless products as substitutions for traditional TDM services. In areas within AT&T's wireless footprint but outside its wireline footprint, only wireless services plan will be offered. In its February 27, 2014 filing, AT&T stated that there is no reason to require AT&T to remain an eligible telecommunications carrier in the trial rate center solely to provide

Lifeline, so it will be requesting that its ETC status be relinquished in the trial rate center and, if approved, it will no longer provide Lifeline there.

5. Petitions to FCC to Allow Incumbent Wireline Lifeline Providers to Opt Out of the Lifeline Program

On January 23, 2012, AT&T met with the FCC and suggested that it should allow incumbent wireline Lifeline providers to choose whether to participate in the Lifeline program. AT&T emphasized that wireline telephone companies are no longer dominant providers of voice service and thus should be able to choose whether to participate in the Lifeline program, just as wireless providers do today.

In Order FCC 12-11, the FCC sought comment on this suggestion in this docket, and how it might be implemented given the statutory framework for revocation of ETC designations set forth in section 214. The FCC wanted to know how the FCC, or the states, would ensure that low-income consumers in all regions of the country have “access to telecommunications and information services.”

On September 15, 2014, AT&T submitted comments to the FCC stating that there is no reason in law or policy for the FCC to continue its current overly-broad ETC regime or its mandatory Lifeline requirements for incumbent local exchange companies. It believes Lifeline participation should be made voluntary for ILECs. AT&T urged the FCC to update its ETC and Lifeline rules and requirements to better reflect the existing competitive landscape.”²⁹

On October 6, 2014, the United States Telecom Association (USTA) filed a petition with the FCC for forbearance from various outdated regulatory requirements applicable to incumbent local exchange carriers, including mandatory provision of Lifeline. The USTA stated that almost all Lifeline customers prefer wireless services, and given the substantial non-reimbursable costs to carriers involved in Lifeline participation and the multiple Lifeline providers in price cap carriers’ service areas, there is no reason to continue compelling price cap carriers to offer Lifeline service to consumers that do not want it.³⁰ An FCC decision is pending.

²⁹ WC Docket No. 10-90, Connect America Fund; WC Docket No. 11-42, Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization.

³⁰ Petition of USTelecom for Forbearance Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. §160(c) from Obsolete ILEC Regulatory Obligations that Inhibit Deployment of Next-Generation Networks.

VI. Lifeline Promotion Activities

Promotional activities in 2014 featured National Lifeline Awareness Week, National Consumer Protection Week, Older American's Month, and ongoing "grass roots" efforts to increase awareness and enrollment in the Lifeline program.

Lifeline Across America. In 2014, the Lifeline Across America Working Group [FCC, National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, and National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates representatives] concentrated on the sixth annual National Lifeline Awareness Week (Lifeline Awareness Week). The Group's national effort is to ensure that low income families and individuals are aware of the Lifeline program and understand the participation requirements, including the requirement that eligible consumers may receive no more than one Lifeline discount. The FCC continues to review reforms to further reduce program fraud and abuse, working with its Lifeline Across America Working Group partners and others to increase awareness among low-income consumers about the recent program reforms and participation requirements.

According to National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, more than fifteen state public utility commissions issued press releases, received gubernatorial proclamations, released radio and television public service announcements, and published letters-to-the-editor to help promote Lifeline.

National Lifeline Awareness Week (September 8-14, 2014). *The Faces of Lifeline* was the theme for Florida's 2014 Lifeline Awareness Week, September 8-14. In addition to increasing awareness among eligible citizens, this year's Lifeline Awareness Week also aimed to continue educating residents on the FCC rule changes to limit benefits to one per eligible household and require annual recertification to continue the benefit. FPSC Chairman Art Graham kicked off the week by showcasing Florida's "Faces of Lifeline." He stressed how people need phone service to help them find jobs, contact community services, call doctors and schools or connect to family and friends. Chairman Graham urged consumers to meet the "Faces of Lifeline" on the FPSC's website, then identify faces within their community, maybe even some neighbors, who could benefit from the program. The FPSC partners with many agencies year-round to make sure eligible consumers know about Lifeline and know how to sign up.

Now in its sixth year, Lifeline Awareness Week events were also held around Florida to help seniors and low-income Floridians learn about, and apply for, the Lifeline program. The FPSC visited senior centers in Lakeland, Orlando, Starke, and Tallahassee and partnered with the Career Source Tampa Bay to help Florida's residents save money on their telephone and utility bills and to share recent Lifeline information. Each Lifeline Awareness Week event offered individual assistance to consumers applying for the program.

Lifeline Outreach to Florida's Superintendents. In July, Florida's Superintendents were sent a Lifeline outreach letter with brochure samples (in three languages) and applications to include in students' Back-to-School information. As a result, the FPSC provided more than 26,000 Lifeline brochures and applications to eligible families in six Florida counties.

National Consumer Protection Week and Other Community Events. The FPSC continuously seeks existing community events as well as new venues and opportunities where Lifeline educational materials can be distributed and discussed with citizens. National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), March 2-8, 2014, was a good backdrop for Lifeline outreach activities. NCPW, an annual consumer education campaign, encourages individuals to take advantage of their consumer rights. For this year’s event, FPSC Chairman Art Graham was featured in a Public Service Announcement about scams targeting utility customers and customer protection tips for the FPSC website; it was also made accessible to media outlets for their broadcasts. Also during NCPW, the FPSC made presentations in Madison, Jasper, Lake Panasoffkee, and at Pow Wow’s in Deland and Mount Dora showing consumers how to save money through energy and water conservation and how to sign up for the Lifeline program.

For the third year, the FPSC participated in a national project called Older Americans Month--celebrated each May to honor and recognize older Americans for the contributions they make to their families, communities, and society. *Safe Today. Healthy Tomorrow.* was this year’s theme, and the FPSC held educational sessions with Florida senior centers in Sarasota, Venice, Jacksonville, and Bristol to show seniors ways to conserve energy and water and learn about the Lifeline program. For the second year, the FPSC distributed brochures and publications at the Jacksonville Expo, where over 5,000 seniors attended. An FPSC article highlighting the FPSC’s website video, “Life Before Air Conditioning,” and the Commission’s outreach activities were featured in the July/August 2014 issue of the Florida Department of Elder Affairs’ *Elder Update*.

Each year the FPSC provides educational packets, including publications, Lifeline brochures and applications in English, Spanish, and Creole, to Florida public libraries across the state for consumer distribution. For the second year, the FPSC’s Library Outreach Campaign increased in number from 333 sites to 583 sites, including all state public libraries and branches. Following the Campaign, many libraries’ requests for additional publications have been filled.

Figure 8. Events and locations where Lifeline information was shared in Florida

Lifeline Events and Locations	
Ambassadors for Aging Day	Active Living Expo
Tallahassee Housing Authority	Pinellas Housing Authority
Clearwater Housing Authority	Baker Manor Housing Authority
Alachua County Senior Center	Taylor County Senior Center
Jefferson County Senior Center	8 th Avenue Senior Center
Barbara Washington Senior Center	Mary L. Singleton Senior Center
Moncrief Senior Center	Woodville Senior Center
Dixie Suwanee County Senior Center	Lafayette Suwanee County Senior Center
Oceanway Senior Center	Louis Dinah Senior Center
Lincoln Villa Senior Center	Ft. Braden Senior Center
Senior Day at Jake Gaither Center	Baker Council on Aging
Florida DOH American Indian Heritage Month	Northeast Community Action Agency
Springfield Community Center	Shine Women’s Conference
Community Rehabilitation Center	Maranatha Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Florida DOEA Fraud Prevention Seminar	Florida DOH Community Fair and Refugee Day

Community Services Block Grant Program. The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity includes Lifeline services as an indicator in its work plan, allowing the Community Action Agencies to report on the number of clients they help to secure Lifeline services. During the October 1, 2012–September 30, 2013 reporting period, an estimated 1,390 households signed up for Lifeline benefits through local Community Action Agencies, with \$181,000 in estimated benefits to clients. For the reporting period, 16 of the 27 community action agencies provided Lifeline enrollment services to clients.

Income-Based Lifeline Applicants. The OPC provides assistance to consumers applying for Lifeline Assistance based upon income level. During July 2013–June 2014 reporting period, OPC received over 20,000 calls from potential applicants seeking assistance, and processed 36,136 applications. The OPC verifies consumer income eligibility for the following telecommunication carriers: Assurance Wireless, AT&T Landline, CenturyLink Landline, SafeLink Wireless, T-Mobile Wireless, and Verizon Landline.

Ongoing Lifeline Outreach. Ensuring easily accessible Lifeline information through the agencies and organizations having regular interaction with eligible consumers is crucial to the Lifeline awareness effort. The Lifeline Partners listed in the next section participate in local community events, offer training sessions, provide updates about program changes, and supply brochures and applications.

Lifeline Partners. Attachment D shows local, state, and federal agencies, organizations, businesses, and telecommunications companies that are involved in the collaborative effort to increase awareness and participation in the Lifeline program. Each month, the FPSC sends a cover letter and informational packet to two organizations to encourage continued Lifeline outreach to their eligible clientele. Additionally, the FPSC attends two community events monthly to promote Lifeline.

VII. Conclusion

As of June 30, 2014, 957,792 eligible customers participated in the Florida Lifeline program. The success of the Florida Lifeline program can be attributed to the continued partnership between the FPSC, DCF, OPC, and other agencies around the state that assist Florida low-income families.

As a result of Florida Lifeline participation, USAC Low Income disbursements for Florida ETCs for the 12-month period ending June 2014, totaled over \$107 million. These dollars enabled Florida citizens qualifying for Lifeline benefits to receive discounted monthly bills with a current credit of at least \$9.25, or a free Lifeline wireless phone with 250 free monthly minutes. The ETC designation of successful prepaid wireless providers, such as SafeLink Wireless Assurance Wireless, and i-wireless, which provide a free phone and free monthly minutes to the customer, has been a major growth factor in the Florida Lifeline program the last several years.

Efforts to increase Lifeline participation can be separated into two categories, consumer outreach and enrollment process. The FPSC, in cooperation with other state and federal agencies, the OPC, ETCs, and other organizations, remains engaged in extensive outreach efforts. Because most of these efforts run concurrently, measuring the impact of any single activity on Lifeline participation is difficult. Nevertheless, outreach efforts overall are having a positive outcome and should be continued. Outreach efforts are also being expanded to include more competitive local exchange carrier and wireless ETCs.

The Commission continues to focus on enrollment process issues as a means of increasing participation. As previously discussed in this report, specific enrollment process initiatives include the following:

- FPSC Lifeline Coordinated Online Application Process
- FPSC/DCF Coordinated Lifeline Enrollment
- Annual Recertification Procedures
- DCF Certification/Verification Web Services Interface
- Lifeline Work Group Meetings

The FPSC remains committed to enabling low-income households in Florida obtain and maintain basic local telephone service to help them find jobs, contact community services, call doctors and schools, and connect to family and friends. The FPSC will continue to identify and find solutions to barriers that may prevent Lifeline from achieving greater success for the benefit of Florida's low-income consumers. The FPSC will also continue its work on streamlining the Lifeline enrollment process and refining the FPSC/DCF Lifeline coordinated application procedure in Florida so that applying for the Lifeline program is easier and faster than in previous years.

Attachment A. 2014 U.S. Poverty Guidelines

Household size (number persons)	2014 U.S. Poverty Guidelines Total Household Annual Income	150% of U.S. Poverty Guidelines Total Household Monthly Income	150% of U.S. Poverty Guidelines Total Household Annual Income*
1	\$11,670	\$1,459	\$17,505
2	\$15,730	\$1,966	\$23,595
3	\$19,790	\$2,474	\$29,685
4	\$23,850	\$2,981	\$35,775
5	\$27,910	\$3,489	\$41,865
6	\$31,970	\$3,996	\$47,955
7	\$36,030	\$4,504	\$54,045
8	\$40,090	\$5,011	\$60,135
*For families with more than 8 persons, add \$6,090 for each additional person to the yearly amount.			

Attachment B. Lifeline Net Enrollment and Year-to-Year Net Growth Rate

ETCs	June 2010	June 2011	Net Growth Rate 2010 to 2011	June 2012	Net Growth Rate 2011 to 2012	June 2013	Net Growth Rate 2012 to 2013	June 2014	Net Growth Rate 2013 to 2014
TracFone	396,114	447,379	12.9%	430,048	-3.9%	490,828	14.1%	543,174	10.7%
Virgin Mobile		286,866	100.0%	428,830	49.5%	323,014	-24.7%	249,664	-22.7%
i-wireless						12,450	100.0%	97,044	679.5%
AT&T	126,114	122,849	-2.6%	102,363	-16.7%	44,796	-56.2%	28,156	-37.2%
CenturyLink	41,593	39,524	-5.0%	35,154	-11.1%	22,179	-36.9%	18,756	-15.4%
Verizon	23,681	22,307	-5.8%	18,496	-17.1%	11,327	-38.8%	8,245	-27.2%
Windstream	5,517	6,249	13.3%	6,775	8.4%	5,176	-23.6%	4,348	-16.0%
T-Mobile		70	100.0%	232	231.4%	1,373	491.8%	3,091	125.1%
FairPoint	3,093	2,446	-20.9%	2,146	-12.3%	1,437	-33.0%	1,307	-9.1%
Tele Circuit				1,497	100.0%	637	-57.5%	666	4.6%
Non-ETC Reseller	13,664	4,941	-63.8%	2,828	-42.8%	979	-65.4%	658	-32.8%
NEFCOM	769	795	3.4%	804	1.1%	712	-11.4%	545	-23.5%
Cox Telecom						41	100.0%	522	1173.2%
Budget Phone	3,099	2,912	-6.0%	1,399	-52.0%	776	-44.5%	407	-47.6%
TDS Telecom	920	811	-11.9%	728	-10.2%	582	-20.1%	406	-30.2%
Knology	959	761	-20.7%	751	-1.3%	516	-31.3%	294	-43.0%
Global Connection				594	100.0%	789	32.8%	275	-65.2%
Frontier	159	157	-1.3%	174	10.8%	114	-34.5%	84	-26.3%
ITS Telecom	147	178	21.1%	190	6.7%	112	-41.1%	77	-31.3%
Nexus	333	201	-39.6%	132	-34.3%	69	-47.7%	51	-26.1%
Smart City	18	23	27.8%	33	43.5%	21	-36.4%	12	-42.9%
FLATEL	1,888	2,845	50.7%	1,469	-48.4%	304	-79.3%	10	-96.8%
Sun-Tel		434	100.0%	1,065	145.4%	13	-98.8%	0	-100.0%
ETCs which Relinquished Designation	23,870	2106	-91.2%	150	-92.9%	0	100.0%	0	0.0%
Total	641,938	943,854	47.0%	1,035,858	9.8%	918,245	-11.4%	957,792	4.3%

Sources: FPSC data requests (2010-2014).

Attachment C. Recertification of Florida Lifeline Subscribers

Company	Number of Subscribers Claimed in February 2014	Number of Lifeline Not Responding To Recertification	Number of Lifeline Subscribers Responding That They Are No Longer Eligible	Number of Subscribers De-Enrolled	Percent of Lifeline Subscribers De-Enrolled
<u>ILECs</u>					
NEFCOM	653	192	0	192	29.40%
Smart City Telecommunications	24	10	0	10	41.67%
TDS/Quincy	533	163	0	163	30.58%
AT&T	37,313	12,696	0	12,696	34.03%
CenturyLink	17,314	6,389	0	6,389	36.90%
ITS Telecommunications	110	58	0	58	52.73%
Frontier	103	41	0	41	39.81%
Verizon	10,525	2,388	0	2,388	22.69%
Windstream	4,766	1,785	0	1,785	37.45%
GTC - Florida, St. Joe, Gulf	952	367	0	367	38.55%
<u>CLECs</u>					
Knology	498	0	217	217	43.57%
Unity Telecom f/k/a dPi	0	0	0	0	N/A
Absolute Home Phones	0	0	0	0	N/A
Global Connection Inc.	330	24	0	24	7.27%
Tele Circuit	103	0	0	0	0.00%
Easy Telephone Services	0	0	0	0	N/A
Budget Prepay	946	400	0	400	42.28%
FLATEL	323	0	0	0	0.00%
Sun-Tel USA	0	0	0	0	N/A
Nexus Communications	0	0	0	0	N/A
Express Phone Service	0	0	0	0	N/A
Cox Florida Telecom, L.P.					N/A
<u>Wireless</u>					
T-Mobile	476	57	0	57	11.97%
Assurance Wireless	285,289	107,178	0	107,178	37.57%
SafeLink Wireless	461,344	22,439	0	22,439	4.86%
i-wireless	3,444	161	0	161	4.67%
Total	825,046	154,348	217	154,565	18.73%

Source: Form 555 forms submitted to FCC and Universal Service Administrative Company by ETCs.

Attachment D. Agencies, Organizations, and Business Lifeline Partners

Florida Lifeline Partners	
AARP - Florida Chapter	Ability Housing of Northeast Florida
ACCESS Florida Community Network	Agency for Health Care Administration
Agency for Persons with Disabilities	Aging Matters in Brevard County
Alliance for Aging, Inc.	Area Agencies on Aging
Big Bend 2-1-1 and other 2-1-1 Agencies	Boley Centers, Inc.
Braille and Talking Book Library	Brain Injury Association of Florida, Inc.
Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs	Capital Area Community Action Agency
Catholic Charities of Central Florida	Centers for Drug Free Living
Centers for Independent Living	City and County Consumer Assistance
City and County Housing Authorities	Foster Grandparent Program
Community Partnership Group	Disability Rights Florida
Faith Radio and other Florida radio stations	Federal Social Security Administration
First Quality Home Care	Florida Alliance for Information and Referral
Florida Assisted Living Association	Florida Association for Community Action
Florida Assoc. of Community Health Centers	Florida Association of Counties
Florida Assoc. of Human Service Admin.	Florida Association of Food Banks (FAFB)
Florida Housing and Redevelopment	Florida Coalition for Children
Florida Coalition for the Homeless	Florida Council on Aging
Florida Deaf Services Centers Association	Florida Department of Children and Families
Florida Department of Community Affairs	Florida Dept. of Economic Opportunity
Florida Department of Education	Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DEA)
Florida Department of Revenue (DOR)	Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs
Florida Developmental Disabilities Council	Florida Elder Care Services
Florida Home Partnership	Florida Hospital Association
Florida Housing Coalition	Florida Housing Finance Corporation
Florida League of Cities, Inc.	Florida Low Income Housing Associates
Florida Nurses Association	Florida Office of Public Counsel (OPC)
Florida Public Libraries	Florida Public School Districts
Florida Rural Legal Services, Inc.	Florida Senior Medicare Patrol
Florida Senior Program	Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc.
Florida Voters League	1000 Friends of Florida, Inc.
Habitat for Humanity – Florida	HANDS of Central Florida
Hemophilia Foundation of Greater Florida	Hispanic Office for Local Assistance
Leon County School Board	Living Stones Native Circle
Marion Senior Services	Mid-Florida Housing Partnership, Inc.
Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	NAACP (Florida Associations)
Nursing Homes Administrators	Florida Dept. of Economic Opportunity
Seminole County Community Development	Seniors First
Senior Resource Alliance	South East American Council, Inc.
Refuge House of the Big Bend	Tallahassee Memorial and other hospitals
Tallahassee Urban League	Tampa Vet Center
Three Rivers Legal Services, Inc.	United Home Care Services
United Way of Florida	Urban Leagues of Florida
U.S. Housing and Urban Development	Washington County Council on Aging