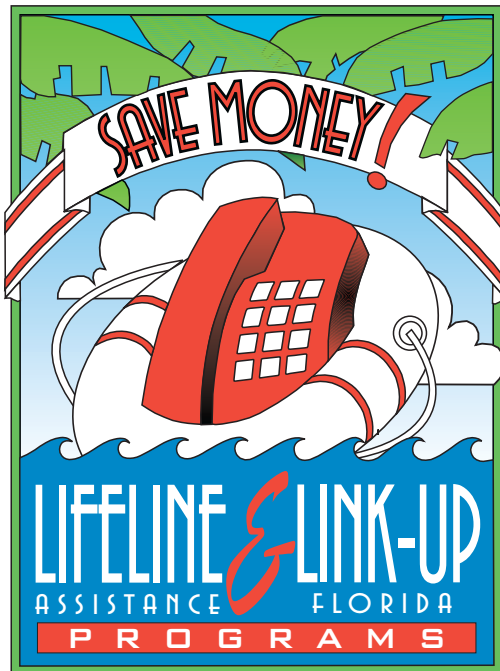


A REPORT TO THE:

Governor

President of the Senate

Speaker of the House of Representatives



**NUMBER OF  
CUSTOMERS  
SUBSCRIBING TO  
LIFELINE SERVICE  
AND THE  
EFFECTIVENESS OF  
ANY PROCEDURES  
TO PROMOTE  
PARTICIPATION**

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Florida Public Service Commission

Office of Market Monitoring and Strategic Analysis

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Division of Consumer Affairs

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The 2003 Florida Legislature passed a comprehensive rewrite of the Florida Statutes governing the regulation of telecommunications companies in Florida. The legislation entitled “The Tele-Competition Innovation and Infrastructure Enhancement Act of 2003” (the 2003 Act) became law on May 23, 2003, by the signature of the Governor. The 2003 Act requires that by December 31, 2003, each state agency that provides benefits to persons eligible for the Lifeline Assistance Program (Lifeline) shall, in cooperation with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Florida Public Service Commission (Commission), and telecommunications companies providing Lifeline service, develop procedures to promote participation in Lifeline. The 2003 Act further requires the Commission to report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 31 each year on the number of customers who are subscribing to Lifeline service and the effectiveness of any procedures to promote participation in that program.<sup>1</sup> This report is prepared pursuant to the requirements of the 2003 Act.

## **I. Description of Lifeline Benefits**

Lifeline is part of the federal Universal Service program designed to enable low-income households to afford basic local telephone service. Under the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) rules, there are four tiers of monthly federal Lifeline support. The first tier of federal support is a \$6.50 credit for the federal subscriber line charge, which is available to all eligible subscribers.

- ◆ The second tier of federal support is a \$1.75 credit that is available to subscribers in those states that have approved the credit. All fifty (50) states have approved this tier of support.
- ◆ The third tier of federal support is one-half the amount of additional state support up to a maximum of \$1.75 in federal support. Because Florida requires carriers to provide an additional \$3.50 credit to Lifeline customers’ bills<sup>2</sup>, Florida Lifeline subscribers currently receive a total monthly credit up to \$13.50, consisting of \$10.00 (\$6.50+\$1.75+\$1.75) in federal support and \$3.50 in state support. The telephone subscriber may receive a credit less than \$13.50 if the subscriber’s bill for basic local telephone service is less than the maximum available credit. At no time is the customer’s bill for local service less than zero.
- ◆ The fourth tier of support, available only to eligible subscribers living on tribal lands, provides an additional credit up to \$25.00 per month. This amount is limited to the extent that the credit does not bring the basic local residential rate below \$1.00 per month.

Link-Up, a companion federal program, provides a 50% reduction in the telephone service hook-up charge, up to a maximum of \$30.00. Eligible residents of tribal lands may

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 364.10(3)(d) and 364.10(3)(e), Florida Statutes.

<sup>2</sup> Since Florida does not have a state universal service fund, the \$3.50 credit is absorbed by the local exchange company providing service.

receive up to \$100 in discounts on initial connection charges. The \$100 maximum is based on the sum of the federally financed 50% discount (up to the \$30 maximum) available to all qualified low-income individuals, plus a dollar-for-dollar match (up to \$70) for connection charges above \$60.

In 1998, the Florida Legislature created an additional program benefiting low-income subscribers through the enactment of Section 364.105, Florida Statutes. This section requires that each incumbent local exchange company provide subscribers no longer qualifying for Lifeline assistance a 30% discount in the residential basic local service rate. The subscriber may receive the subsidy for one year from the date the subscriber ceases to be qualified for Lifeline.

## **II. Lifeline Eligibility**

Eligibility for both Lifeline and Link-Up is determined by subscriber enrollment in any one of the following programs:

- ◆ Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- ◆ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- ◆ Food Stamps
- ◆ Medicaid
- ◆ Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- ◆ Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Plan (LIHEAP)
- ◆ Bureau of Indian Affairs programs<sup>3</sup>

As a result of a Commission-approved 2001 settlement agreement between BellSouth and the Office of the Public Counsel (OPC), BellSouth expanded Lifeline eligibility to its subscribers with annual incomes up to 125% of the Federal poverty guidelines. A further potential expansion of Lifeline eligibility came through the passage of the 2003 Act. The 2003 Act specifies that any local exchange telecommunications company (LEC) authorized by the Commission to reduce its switched network access rates pursuant to Section 364.164, Florida Statutes, shall provide Lifeline service to customers who meet an income eligibility test at 125% or less of the federal poverty income guidelines. Although the Commission has not yet ruled on recent petitions to reduce switched network access rates filed by BellSouth, Verizon and Sprint, both Verizon and Sprint have filed tariffs to expand Lifeline eligibility to customers with incomes at 125% or less of the federal poverty guidelines.<sup>4</sup> Because BellSouth, Verizon and Sprint provide telephone service to the vast majority of Florida consumers, it is reasonable to expect that the new eligibility guidelines are available to most consumers in Florida with incomes at or less than the 125% threshold.

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<sup>3</sup> Eligible consumers living on tribal lands qualify for Lifeline if they participate in one of the following federal assistance programs: (1) Tribal TANF; (2) National School Lunch Program; or (3) Head Start Subsidy. As of September 2003, Sprint had 5 customers subscribing to Lifeline through the tribal lands provision.

<sup>4</sup> Tariffs including the 125% income eligibility criteria were filed by Verizon and Sprint on July 17, 2003 and July 28, 2003, respectively.

### III. Lifeline Subscribership and Participation Rates

Table 1 shows the number of Lifeline subscribers at year-end from 1998 through September 2003. The data reveal an upward trend in Lifeline subscribership since 1998.

Table 1 Florida Lifeline Subscribership

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	September 2003
Lifeline Subscribers	130,139	130,281	134,227	144,610	142,548	143,609

Source: FCC: *State-by-State Telephone Revenues and Universal Service Data* [April 2001 and September 2003]; and Responses to FPSC Data Requests.

Table 2 shows Lifeline participation rates for the years 1998 through September 2003.<sup>5</sup>

Table 2 Lifeline Participation Rate in Florida

Year End	Lifeline Enrollment	Eligible Households <sup>6</sup>	Participation Rate
December 1998	130,139	816,278	15.9%
December 1999	130,281	816,278	15.9%
December 2000	134,227	816,278	16.4%
December 2001	144,610	850,000	17.0%
December 2002	142,548	819,112	17.4%
September 2003	143,609	819,112	17.5%

Source: FCC: *State-by-State Telephone Revenues and Universal Service Data* [April 2001 and September 2003]; DCF; and Responses to FPSC Data Requests

Table 2 reflects that Florida's Lifeline participation rate steadily increased from 1998 to 2003. As of September 30, 2003, the participation rate was 17.5%. While the participation rates may seem low, this should not be interpreted that the non-participating eligible population are without telephone service. Compared to the 819,112 households eligible for Lifeline, the total number of Florida households without telephone service is approximately 351,645.<sup>7</sup> Table 3 shows telephone penetration rates for two selected income categories that represent Florida households falling below US poverty threshold levels, thereby satisfying Lifeline eligibility conditions.

<sup>5</sup> The participation rate is the ratio of enrolled subscribers to eligible population. Eligible population figures were provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

<sup>6</sup> Eligible population figures do not include households at or less than 125% of federal poverty guidelines. The Commission is attempting to obtain estimates of eligible households including this threshold.

<sup>7</sup>FCC: Telephone Penetration Report By Income By State [May 2003].

**Table 3 Percentage of Florida Households with Telephone Service**

Household Income	1985	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
≤\$9,999	77.0	84.2	86.7	86.6	84.4	85.4	87.8	85.6	84.2	89.7
\$10,000-\$19,999	87.6	91.1	93.7	94.0	92.0	93.6	91.5	90.2	91.1	94.3
All Households	88.9	92.4	93.9	93.4	92.1	93.3	92.6	92.4	92.3	94.7

Source: FCC: *Telephone Penetration Report By Income By State* [May 2003]

The years selected for Table 3 coincide with the introduction of Lifeline in 1984, BellSouth’s adoption of Lifeline in 1994 and passage of the Telecom Act of 1996. The data in Table 3 show that from 1985 to 1995, telephone penetration rates increased significantly for Florida’s poorest consumers. While the penetration rates for these subscriber groups have fluctuated since 1995, these groups have experienced significant growth in penetration in Florida since 1985. The telephone penetration gap between low-income households and all households from 1985 to 2002 is slowly declining in Florida.

With the telephone penetration rate for the lowest income households at approximately 90%, it would appear that even without the Lifeline subsidy, most eligible households have telephone service. The current Lifeline participation rate of 17.5% may suggest that many of the eligible low-income population are either not aware of Lifeline assistance or choose not to receive the subsidy.

Table 4 depicts the distribution of Lifeline enrollment from 2000 to September 2003 by Florida local exchange companies. The data show that, with the exception of Verizon, BellSouth, and ITS Telecom, every local exchange company serving in Florida saw an increase in Lifeline enrollment between 2002 and 2003 and have seen fairly significant enrollment increases since 2000.

**Table 4 Lifeline Participation in Florida**

Florida Local Exchange Companies	2000 Participants	2001 Participants	Growth Rate	2002 Participants	Growth Rate	September 2003 Participants	Growth Rate
BellSouth	104,575	105,564	1%	104,503	(1%)	102,757	(2%)
Verizon	18,685	25,266	35%	22,850	(12%)	20,138	(12%)
Sprint-FL	7,712	9,779	27%	10,706	9%	14,937	40%
GTC, Inc.	1,504	1,819	21%	1,952	7%	2,274	16%
ALLTEL	1,128	1,434	27%	1,737	21%	2,442	41%
TDS Telecom	289	358	24%	364	2%	476	31%
Northeast	253	301	19%	340	13%	458	35%
Frontier	47	62	32%	69	11%	101	46%

Florida Local Exchange Companies	2000 Participants	2001 Participants	Growth Rate	2002 Participants	Growth Rate	September 2003 Participants	Growth Rate
ITS Telecom	34	27	(20%)	27	0%	26	(4%)
Total	134,227	144,610	8%	142,548	(1.4%)	143,609	.7%

Sources: Responses to May 2001, April 2002, and September 2003 FPSC data requests; and USAC [January 2003]

#### IV. Effectiveness of Lifeline Promotional Activities

During the last couple of years, the Commission, itself and in cooperation with other state and federal agencies and other organizations, has engaged in extensive promotional activities for Lifeline and Link-Up. These promotional activities are described in detail later in this report. Because most of these activities are running concurrently, it is exceedingly difficult to select one activity and identify it as the specific activity that resulted in a change in Lifeline enrollment.

While participation rates as depicted in Table 2 have generally shown increases from 1998 through September 2003, no one year has produced a notable increase. As stated previously, the current participation rate of 17.5% may suggest that a significant portion of the Lifeline eligible population is not aware of Lifeline service.

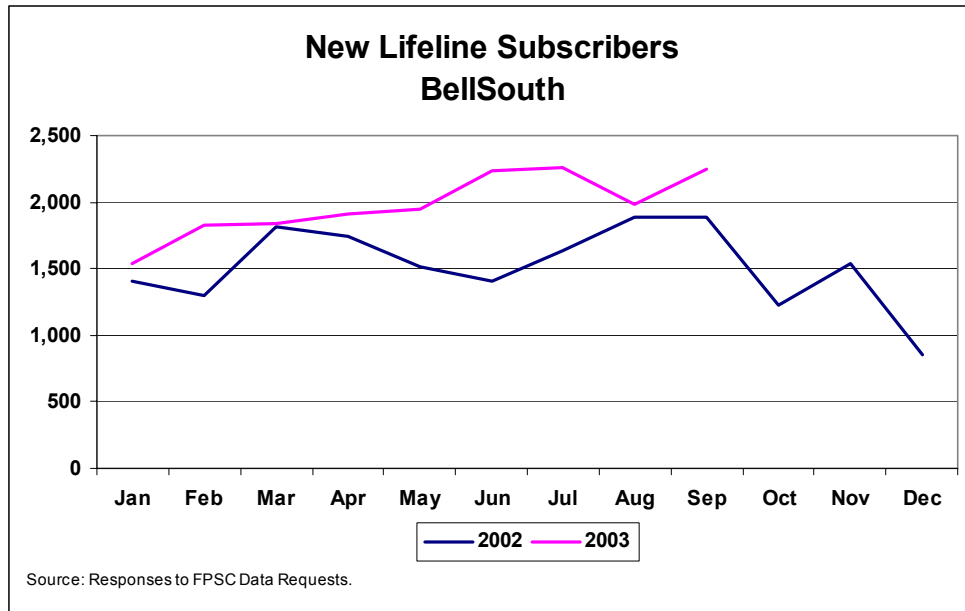
A major segment of historical and current promotional activities is geared toward increasing consumer awareness of Lifeline benefits and eligibility. In particular are two events that occurred during 2003. The first event was the passage of the 2003 Act. Although not effective until May 2003, the proposed legislation containing expanded customer eligibility criteria for Lifeline was introduced in April 2003. There was extensive media coverage of legislative discussions regarding the proposed legislation prior to its subsequent passage. The second event was the DCF Lifeline Project that implemented a new Lifeline notification procedure and streamlined eligibility verification for DCF clients. The effectiveness of these two events may be reflected in the number of new Lifeline subscribers.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 depict the number of new Lifeline subscribers for BellSouth, Sprint, and Verizon, respectively, for the years 2002 and 2003. Each of these local exchange companies generally experienced higher monthly levels of new subscribers in 2003 than in 2002. In addition, both Sprint and Verizon experienced significant increases in new Lifeline subscribers after implementing revised tariffs in August 1, 2003, reflecting expansion of Lifeline criteria to include the income eligibility test.<sup>8</sup> Since the implementation of these tariffs, 339 Verizon customers and 231 Sprint customers have subscribed to Lifeline under the 125% income test. It appears that the implementation of the expanded Lifeline criteria has resulted in an increase in Lifeline awareness and, consequently, an increase in new Lifeline subscribers.

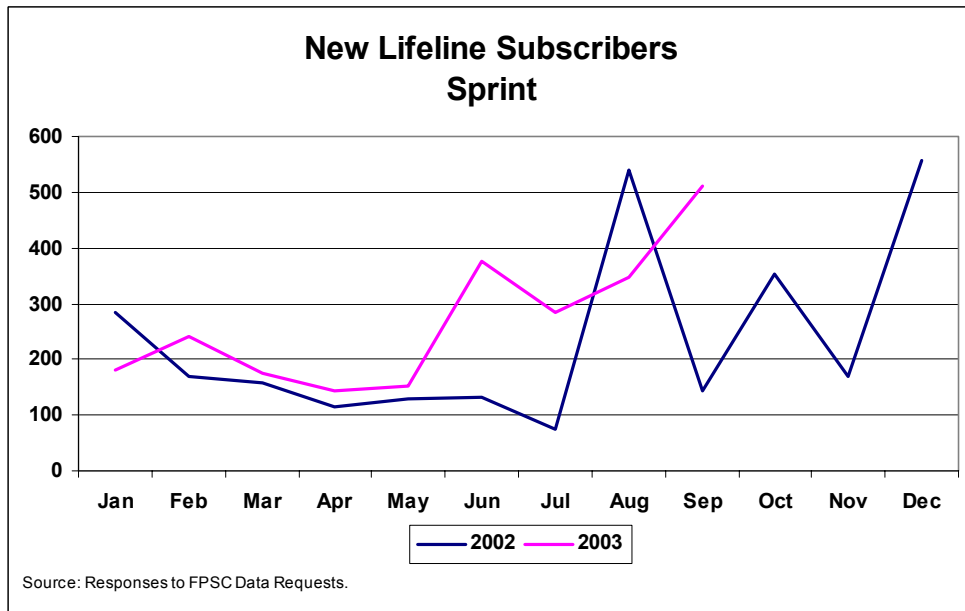
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<sup>8</sup>BellSouth added an income eligibility test of 125% of federal poverty guidelines to its Lifeline eligibility criteria as part of a Commission-approved settlement by BellSouth and the Office of Public Counsel in July, 2001.

**Figure 1**

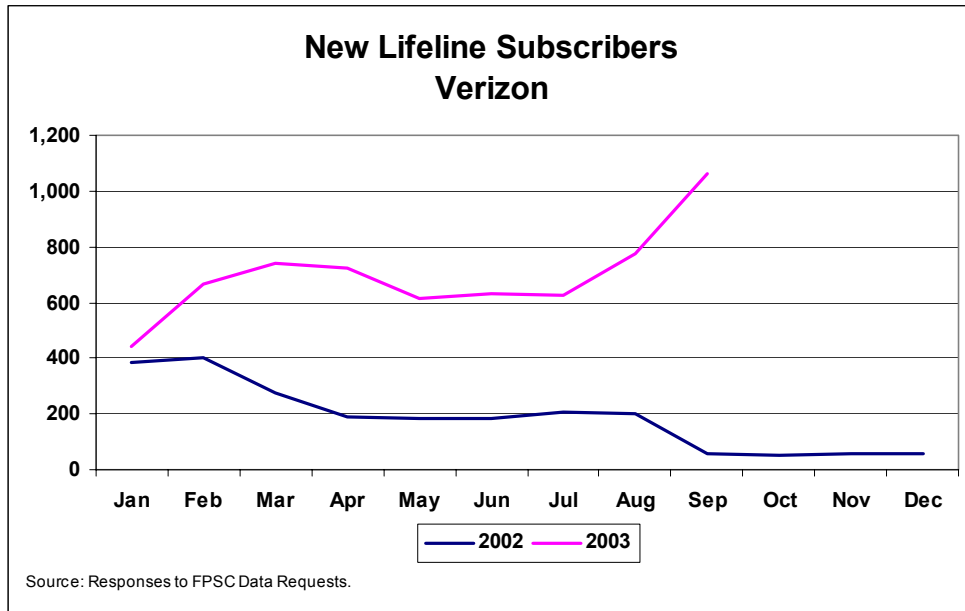


**Figure 2**



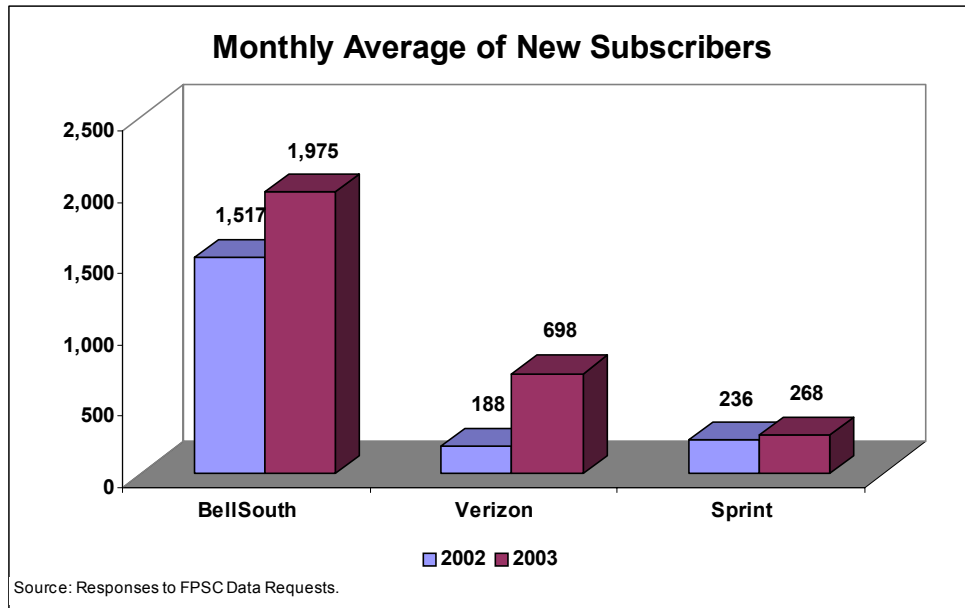


**Figure 3**



This trend of increasing monthly new subscribers is also reflected in the monthly average of new subscribers as depicted in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**



While the number of new subscribers generally indicates an increase in enrollment on a monthly basis, a comparable increase is not reflected in total Lifeline enrollment. This is due to the monthly number of customers who discontinued receiving Lifeline assistance during the year.

Since both the DCF Lifeline Project and the 2003 Act occurred in mid-2003, it is still too early in the process of implementation of these efforts to assess the sustained effectiveness of these events. At the time of the preparation of this report, Lifeline enrollment information was limited to data available as of September 30, 2003. It is expected that in future years, as experience with promotional activities is gained and additional enrollment data becomes available, conclusions regarding the effectiveness of promotional activities will be more readily apparent.

## **V. Development of Procedures to Promote Lifeline, Pursuant to Section 364.10(3)(d), Florida Statutes**

The requirement of the 2003 Act to develop procedures to promote Lifeline participation in cooperation with DCF, this Commission, other state agencies and the telecommunication companies providing Lifeline services, has provided a unique opportunity to initiate a comprehensive, collaborative process to develop promotional procedures that will have a statewide impact. Activities to promote Lifeline and Link-Up have been taking place since 1995, but none as comprehensive as the current effort.

Since July 2003, state and federal agencies, organizations, and telecommunications companies have been working together on the Lifeline Implementation Project (Project) to develop new promotional procedures. Although several state agencies are involved in the administration of the eligible programs, DCF is the only Florida state agency that determines eligibility and provides program benefits directly to citizens as described in the 2003 Act. Recognizing the importance of Lifeline and Link-Up to eligible citizens, however, other agencies and organizations have joined the Project on a voluntary basis. Following is a list of the Project participants, and a description of the steps that are being taken to develop and implement additional procedures to promote Lifeline participation.

### **A. Project Participants**

Throughout this process the Project participants have learned about additional organizations that have contact with eligible individuals and that may be able to assist in this outreach effort. It is anticipated that the list of participants will continue to grow as Lifeline promotional procedures are further developed. The following state and federal agencies, organizations, and telecommunications companies have participated in the Project meetings thus far.

State and Federal Agencies, and Organizations:

- ◆ AARP - Florida Chapter (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons)
- ◆ Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI)
- ◆ Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA)
- ◆ Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- ◆ Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA)

- ◆ Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DEA)
- ◆ Florida Office of the Public Counsel (OPC)
- ◆ Florida Public Service Commission
- ◆ Federal Social Security Administration (SSA) - Tallahassee District
- ◆ Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI)

Telecommunications Companies:

- ◆ BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. (BellSouth)
- ◆ GTCOM
- ◆ Smart City Telecom
- ◆ Sprint-Florida, Inc. (Sprint)
- ◆ TDS Telecom/Quincy
- ◆ TTSC/NEFCOM-Northeast
- ◆ Verizon Florida, Inc. (Verizon)

**B. Steps to Develop Promotional Procedures**

In July 2003, the Commission initiated the Project with other state and federal agencies, organizations, and LECs to develop procedures to promote Lifeline participation. During July and August, Commission staff held individual meetings with agency and LEC representatives to discuss implementation of the new statutory requirements. On September 9, 2003, the Project participants began holding joint meetings to collaboratively develop procedures to promote Lifeline. The development process has proceeded more quickly than originally anticipated. The Project participants are still continuing to develop and implement new procedures, but several key tasks have already been completed. The Project includes the following tasks:

- ◆ Reviewing the eligible programs to determine which state agencies provide benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline.
- ◆ Identifying categories of eligible consumers who are and are not currently being provided Lifeline information.
- ◆ Evaluating existing promotional procedures and determining options for expanding those procedures to increase the effectiveness of the outreach activities.
- ◆ Developing new procedures to provide Lifeline information to categories of eligible consumers who are not currently being provided Lifeline information.
- ◆ Developing procedures for providing Lifeline educational materials produced by the LECs to the state and federal agencies.
- ◆ Determining the most efficient and effective approach to implement any new procedures.

- ◆ Considering new approaches for consumer outreach.

The Project participants have completed the review of the eligible programs to determine which agencies provide benefits. It has been determined that the DCF is the only Florida state agency that provides benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline. The DCF determines eligibility and provides benefits to recipients of Food Stamps or TANF. Benefits from the other eligible programs are provided by local entities or federal agencies. However, because the participating state agencies work in coordination with the local entities that provide benefits, they have volunteered to assist in the development of procedures to promote Lifeline through those organizations. The role of each agency in the eligible programs will be discussed in more detail later.

The Project participants have completed much of the work to identify categories of consumers who are and are not currently being provided Lifeline information. The Project participants believe a majority of eligible consumers can be reached by expanding and increasing existing Lifeline promotional procedures. However, the participants are still working to identify additional groups of eligible consumers who might not have easy access to Lifeline information. The Project participants have identified the following groups of individuals for whom specific outreach efforts should be developed and implemented. Specifically, individuals who: (1) are being transitioned from welfare but qualify for Lifeline based upon the new income eligibility criteria or the discounted transitional Lifeline benefit, (2) individuals who reside in nursing home facilities, and (3) individuals who reside in assisted living facilities and adult family care homes. A more detailed discussion of the steps being taken to develop procedures to reach these target groups will be provided later.

The Project participants have also completed a review of existing promotional procedures. Most of the entities represented on the Project have previously participated in some form of Lifeline outreach activities; some as a one-time event and others on a recurring basis. The Project participants determined that it would be appropriate to continue any regularly recurring promotional activities that are in effect. The participants also agreed that for those agencies that do not currently provide Lifeline materials on a recurring basis, it would be appropriate for those agencies to determine if the regular dissemination of Lifeline educational materials can be incorporated into the client interview processes within the local agencies that provide benefits.

Work is still in progress on the remaining tasks of developing and implementing new promotional procedures. The following is a discussion of the role that each of the Project participants is playing in this process. The discussion includes the eligible programs that each participant is involved with, past and present outreach efforts, existing procedures that can be continued or expanded, and new procedures that are being considered for development and implementation. Although the focus of the Project has been developing procedures within the state agencies, information on outreach efforts related to the federal eligible programs has been included for informational purposes.

**AARP - Florida Chapter:** The requirements of the 2003 Act do not apply to the AARP. However, the AARP is a strong advocate for Lifeline awareness, and representatives of the

AARP-Florida Chapter have offered to assist the Commission and other state agencies in the development of promotional procedures. The AARP's previous Lifeline outreach efforts include a 2002 outreach campaign in which the AARP and Commission partnered to inform low-income AARP members about the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs. The DCF, DEA, and LECs assisted with the outreach campaign. The AARP currently provides Lifeline information on a recurring basis in its magazine, and at the three Florida AARP Offices located in Miami, St. Petersburg, and Tallahassee. The AARP has agreed to continue these promotional activities.

**Agency for Workforce Innovation and Workforce Florida, Inc.:** WFI is the state's chief workforce policy organization. Created by the Workforce Innovation Act of 2000, the public-private partnership supports and promotes economic growth through workforce development. The AWI serves as the administrative agency for WFI. Neither the AWI nor WFI provide benefits through any of the eligible programs. However, due to WFI's extensive contact with eligible individuals, WFI has volunteered to assist with the outreach efforts.

WFI's Better Jobs/Better Wages Council assists families transitioning from welfare to work and former welfare recipients working in low-wage jobs with limited mobility. WFI programs are implemented through 24 regional workforce boards. Workforce development services are provided through a system of more than 200 One-Stop Career Centers designed to provide easy access to services including job placement, job training, and temporary cash assistance. The WFI regional workforce boards and One-Stop Career Centers work in coordination with the DCF District Offices and other organizations to assist citizens at the local level. WFI is currently working with its regional workforce boards to develop procedures to provide Lifeline information to individuals visiting the One-Stop Career Centers. Procedures will be tailored to fit the needs of each region.

**Agency for Health Care Administration:** AHCA has contact with recipients of Medicaid and SSI benefits, but does not provide benefits through either program. Specifically, AHCA administers the Medicaid Program, but the DCF determines client eligibility and benefits are distributed by approved Medicaid providers. The SSA performs all functions for the SSI Program (i.e., administration, eligibility determination, distribution of benefits.) Although it is likely that Medicaid and SSI recipients will receive Lifeline information through the DCF or SSA, AHCA has volunteered to assist in distributing information in other forums not used by those agencies.

The Project participants determined that eligible citizens residing in nursing homes may not have easy access to Lifeline information. The participants agreed that it would be appropriate to develop procedures to increase awareness of Lifeline within this target group. It was determined that Lifeline information could be provided to nursing homes through an existing AHCA program. Specifically, AHCA's Long Term Care Monitoring Program ensures that all nursing homes in Florida are visited by a Quality of Care Monitor each quarter. Procedures have recently been developed whereby the Quality of Care Monitors will provide each nursing home administrator with a Lifeline educational kit. The Commission will then work with the nursing home administrators to ensure that the nursing homes have adequate supplies of educational materials available to nursing home residents and their family members who may be eligible for

Lifeline Assistance. Additionally, AHCA is investigating the possibility of providing Lifeline educational information through quarterly newsletters, health fairs, and mailouts.

**Florida Department of Children and Families:** As stated previously, the DCF determines eligibility and provides benefits to recipients of Food Stamps or TANF. The DCF also determines eligibility for Medicaid, however, benefits are distributed by approved Medicaid providers. The DCF began its Lifeline outreach efforts with a mass mailing in 1998. The DCF has since implemented procedures to promote Lifeline on a regularly recurring basis. Specifically, the Florida Legislature appropriated \$500,000 for fiscal year 2001-2002 to be transferred from the Commission's Regulatory Trust Fund to the DCF to fund a Lifeline Project. On January 15, 2003, the Legislative Budget Commission approved the DCF Lifeline Project expenditure plan, which was designed to use only \$130,050 of the original appropriation. During 2002 and 2003, the DCF, Commission, Florida Telecommunications Industry Association and LECs worked together to implement the DCF Lifeline Project.

The DCF has modified its eligibility determination procedures so that information about the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs will be provided during client interviews. Brochures and posters are provided by the Commission to individual DCF field offices for distribution to program beneficiaries. The DCF provides an eligibility notice to all clients who are determined to be eligible for Medicaid, Food Stamps, or TANF. Effective April 21, 2003, the eligibility notice also informs clients that they may be eligible for Lifeline Assistance. Prior to that date, the required proof of eligibility varied between telecommunications companies. Under the DCF Lifeline Project, the LECs agreed to accept the DCF's eligibility notice as proof of eligibility for Lifeline. This new notification procedure and the streamlined eligibility verification should provide increased awareness and, subsequently, enrollment in these programs. Several telecommunications companies have confirmed that they are receiving requests for Lifeline Assistance from customers who have received the new DCF eligibility notice.

During discussions of the Project, it was determined that no changes are needed to the DCF promotional procedures at this time. The Commission and DCF will continue to work together to ensure that the DCF District Offices receive adequate supplies of educational materials for distribution to clients.

**Florida Department of Community Affairs:** The DCA's Division of Housing and Community Development administers the LIHEAP, but does not determine client eligibility or provide benefits. The DCA provides LIHEAP grants to local governments and non-profit agencies to assist eligible low-income households in meeting the costs of home heating and cooling. Prior to implementation of the Project, Lifeline educational packets were sent by the Commission to all 34 agencies in Florida that administer the LIHEAP program at the local level. The DCA is currently working with those agencies to incorporate the regular distribution of Lifeline educational materials into their client interview process.

**Florida Department of Elder Affairs:** The DEA does not administer or provide benefits through any of the eligible programs, but does have contact with eligible individuals. The DEA has been assisting with Lifeline outreach efforts since 1998. The DEA currently has procedures

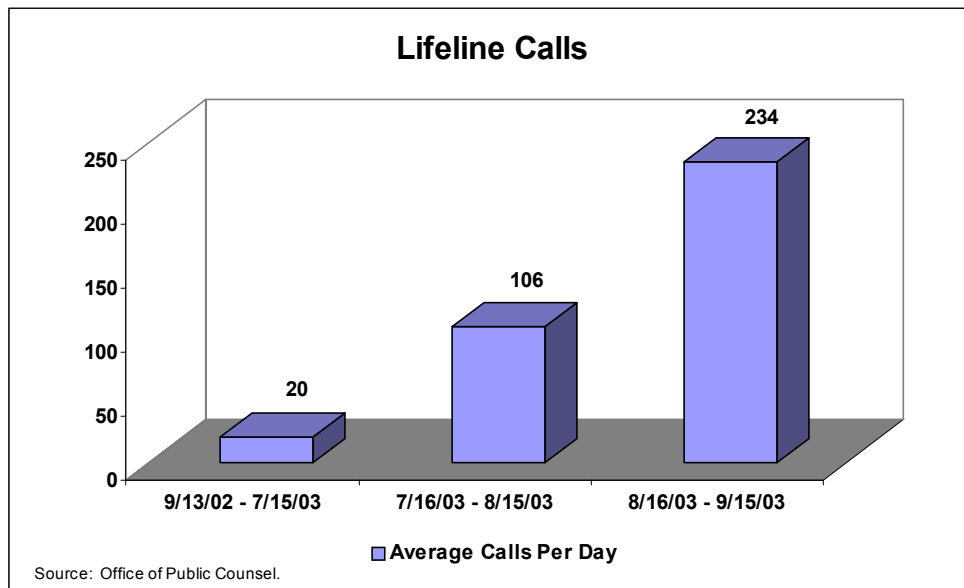
in place for providing Lifeline information to eligible citizens with whom the agency has contact. The DEA regularly includes information about the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs in its Elder Update newsletter. The DEA also provides educational information through its Elder Helpline, and at health fairs and expos. It was determined that it would be appropriate for the DEA to continue to provide Lifeline information through these means.

Additionally, the Project participants determined that there are eligible individuals residing in Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) and Adult Family Care Homes who may not have easy access to Lifeline information. The DEA is currently reviewing options for providing information to those individuals. Some options under consideration include: (1) posting Lifeline information on an ALF Web site that was recently developed by the DEA, (2) contacting the Florida Assisted Living Affiliation and Florida Association of Homes for the Aging to request that they put Lifeline information in their member newsletters and on their Web sites, and (3) sending brochures to ALF staff training providers to hand out during ALF training sessions. Also, the DEA is investigating the possibility of involving caregiver associations and programs, as well as DEA volunteers.

**Florida Office of the Public Counsel:** As discussed previously, the 2003 Act expanded the Lifeline eligibility criteria to include individuals who meet an income eligibility test at 125 percent of the federal poverty income guidelines in some cases. Section 364.10(3)(a), Florida Statutes, states in part that “The Office of Public Counsel shall certify and maintain claims submitted by a customer for eligibility under the income test authorized by this subsection.” Accordingly, the OPC has implemented procedures to process customer applications.

Figure 5 depicts the average number of telephone calls received by the OPC inquiring about Lifeline. The telephone calls increased from an average of 20 calls per day prior to July 15, 2003 to 234 telephone calls per day on September 15, 2003.

**Figure 5**



As of September 30, 2003, the OPC had received 7,017 requests for certification for Lifeline under the income eligibility test. Of those requests, 6,235 were approved and the remainder either have been denied or are pending. The OPC's procedures include telephone consultations to determine initial eligibility, distribution of applications to customers, review of submitted applications, written notification of the eligibility determination, and provision of customer eligibility information to the appropriate LECs. Customers who are currently receiving telephone service from BellSouth, Sprint, or Verizon are then enrolled in Lifeline by their telephone company based upon information provided by the OPC. Customers who do not currently have a telephone must contact their telephone company directly to request the installation of telephone service and enrollment for both Lifeline and Link-Up benefits.

**Florida Public Service Commission:** The Commission's Lifeline consumer outreach program began in 1995 following establishment of the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs by the Florida Legislature. The focus of the outreach program has been, and will continue to be, getting educational materials into the hands of those agencies, organizations, and individuals most likely to come into contact with citizens who qualify for the benefits. For this purpose, the Commission publishes a variety of educational materials, including brochures and posters in English and Spanish. Through our partnerships with other agencies, the Commission became aware of a growing need to provide Lifeline information in the Haitian Creole language. Consequently, the Commission's Lifeline brochures and posters have been translated into Haitian Creole and are anticipated to be available for distribution by the end of 2003.

Further, the Commission has formed partnerships with a number of organizations who have graciously worked with us to provide Lifeline information to the public. In addition to the Project participants, the Commission has partnered with county libraries, city and county consumer affairs offices, churches, senior centers, a university social work program, and telecommunications companies. The Commission also regularly provides Lifeline information at utility hearings and on the Commission's Web site.

During the Project, it was determined that one change should be made to the Commission's current procedure for providing educational materials to other agencies and organizations. Section 364.10(3)(b), Florida Statutes, requires that "Each local exchange telecommunications company subject to this subsection shall provide to each state and federal agency providing benefits to persons eligible for Lifeline service applications, brochures, pamphlets, or other materials that inform such persons of their eligibility for Lifeline, and each state agency providing such benefits shall furnish the materials to affected persons at the time they apply for benefits." Because the Commission already has procedures in place for entities to order Lifeline brochures and posters, the Project participants determined that it would be more efficient to continue using the current process for distributing the educational materials to the state and federal agencies. However, these educational materials will now be produced by the LECs. Presently, this requirement applies to BellSouth, Sprint, and Verizon. Each of these companies has agreed to produce educational materials using the Commission's current format, and provide them to the Commission as needed for distribution to the state and federal agencies.



**Federal Social Security Administration - Tallahassee District:** The SSI Program is administered by the SSA. The SSA District Offices determine client eligibility and distribute program benefits at the local level. In January, 2003, the SSA - Tallahassee District Office began working with the Commission to expand Lifeline outreach to all of the SSA Offices in Florida. Information packets were sent to all 57 SSA District Offices. The SSA and the Commission will continue to work together to ensure that the SSA District Offices receive the necessary educational materials to provide to SSI recipients.

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:** The Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8) Program is under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), but is administered at the state level through local public housing agencies. Prior to the Project, Lifeline educational kits were sent to all 128 agencies that administer Section 8 Housing in Florida. Some agencies have placed as many as four separate orders for additional educational materials. Additional information was subsequently sent to inform the agencies of the new income eligibility criteria. HUD was not represented in the initial phase of the Project, but has assisted with outreach efforts at the local level. The Commission will continue to work with the local public housing agencies to ensure that they receive adequate supplies of educational materials to provide to eligible citizens in their program.

**Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs:** As discussed previously, individuals who are receiving benefits through a qualified Bureau of Indian Affairs program are eligible for expanded Lifeline and Link-Up benefits. The DCF is assisting the Commission in learning more about these programs and the best avenues for providing information to eligible individuals residing on Florida's tribal lands. Florida's tribes fall under the Bureau of Indian Affairs Regional Office located in Nashville, Tennessee. Florida's two federally recognized tribes are the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes. Presently, there is one small Head Start Program serving 20 children of the Miccosukee Tribe, and one school lunch program in Clewiston for children of the Seminole Tribe. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was not represented in the initial phase of the Project. However, the agencies that are located near federally recognized lands are being made aware of the expanded benefits so they may inform clients living in those areas. Further, the Commission will continue to work with other agencies to ensure that eligible individuals living on tribal lands are informed of the availability of Lifeline.

**Telecommunications Companies:** The LECs have worked jointly with the state agencies on outreach efforts such as the DCF Lifeline Project, the OPC's implementation of the income eligibility criteria procedures, and this Project. Additionally, each of the LECs that offer Lifeline provides Lifeline information to the customers on an annual basis through mailouts or bill inserts. Some companies voluntarily provide Lifeline information more than once a year.

Some companies have initiated outreach activities at the local level within their service territories, often working jointly with the local public assistance organizations. This type of grass roots work at the local level is a vital component in the effort to increase Lifeline awareness. For example, the OPC, BellSouth and Linking Solutions have developed a grass roots campaign to educate consumers on the availability of Lifeline and Link-Up. Non-profit organizations, churches, and community groups, that naturally serve eligible consumers, are encouraged to join

the campaign as Alliance Partners. Alliance Partners participate in a training session, share the information with their members, and through their outreach programs assist consumers with the application process. The campaign also includes community events with the Alliance Partners to further promote the availability of services.

In addition, Verizon has also conducted a number of consumer-focused meetings with organizations representing low-income Floridians, including senior citizens. Most recently, Verizon conducted an informational meeting at Presbyterian Villas in Tampa. The meeting was an opportunity to advise residents at a large senior housing facility of the benefits of Lifeline and to assist in enrolling eligible residents. If requested, Verizon will continue to host similar meetings at other locations throughout the Tampa Bay region. Similarly, during the second half of 2003 Sprint held Customer Appreciation Day events in Leesburg, Fort Walton, Winter Park and Punta Gorda. Sprint employees had Lifeline brochures and information available at the events for customers who attended.

**Additional Outreach Efforts:** It is anticipated that future outreach efforts will still rely heavily on the use of educational materials, such as brochures and posters. However, outreach efforts are increasingly taking advantage of improvements in computer technology and providing more information via internet Web sites. The Project participants have also discussed the possibility of holding a Lifeline Awareness Week in 2004 to bring about greater awareness of Lifeline throughout the state.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Lifeline enrollment growth will require continued outreach efforts that are needed to attract new subscribers. The Project participants will continue to work together to implement new procedures that have already been developed and develop additional procedures to increase awareness of the Lifeline and Link-Up. Continued monitoring of the results of all Lifeline outreach programs should provide valuable information about the effectiveness of the new procedures.