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**Report to  
The Vermont Legislature**

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# **Lifeline Eligibility and Participation**

**In Accordance with 2017 Act 41 Sec 3**

**Submitted to:       General Assembly**

**Submitted by:       Sean Brown, Commissioner  
                          Department for Children and Families**

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**AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES  
Department For Children And Families**

# Lifeline Eligibility and Participation

## Introduction

The Lifeline Program is a financial subsidy program that assists consumers with paying for their telecommunications services. In March 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a reform and modernization order for the Lifeline Program. Among the changes adopted, the FCC eliminated categorical eligibility for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (called Reach Up in Vermont) and fuel assistance. In addition, the FCC imposed a universal income eligibility requirement of 135% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This new requirement represented a significant change from Vermont's state-specific income eligibility criteria of 175% of the FPL for individuals age 65 years or older and 150% of the FPL for individuals under age 65. Vermont and nine other states petitioned the FCC for waiver of the new requirements. The FCC granted Vermont's petition, which allowed Vermont to continue to grant categorical eligibility to recipients of Reach Up and fuel assistance and to maintain State-specific income eligibility criteria through October 31, 2017. Act 41, *An act relating to the State Telecommunications Plan*, updated the language in Vermont's Lifeline statute to align with federal law effective November 1, 2017.

Section 3 of Act 41 requires that the Department for Children and Families, in consultation with the Department of Public Service, provides a report describing the eligibility and participation rates in Vermont with respect to both the Federal and State Lifeline Programs.

## Eligibility and Participation Rates

A household may qualify for Federal Lifeline benefits based on income or participation in an eligible federal assistance program. A household that qualifies for participation in the Federal Lifeline Program is automatically eligible for a State Lifeline benefit for wireline voice telephone service.

To qualify for Lifeline benefits based on income, a household's gross annual income must be equal to or below 135% of the FPL. Households are categorically eligible for Lifeline benefits if the household contains at least one member who participates in one of the following federal assistance programs:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit
- Tribal Assistance Programs (Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribally-administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Head Start)

As of November 2020, there were a total of 9,353 households participating in the Federal and State Lifeline programs, an increase of 796 households from November 2019 (see Lifeline Eligibility and Participation report, submitted January 1, 2020). The chart below shows a breakdown of participating households, by basis for eligibility:

<b>Basis for Eligibility</b>	<b>Number of Households 2020</b>
Income at or below 135% FPL	381
SNAP	687
Medicaid	7498
SSI	81
Federal Public Housing Assistance	123
Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension	15
Unknown <sup>1</sup>	568
<b>Total</b>	<b>9353</b>

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<sup>1</sup> The FCC has designated the Universal Service Administration Company (USAC) as the permanent administrator for the Lifeline program. USAC was unable to determine the basis for eligibility for 568 households that were originally determined to be eligible for the program by DCF.