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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Order Instituting Rulemaking to Update
the California Universal Telephone
Service (California LifeLine) Program.

Rulemaking 20-02-008

**ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING
RENEWAL REQUIREMENTS AND REQUESTING COMMENTS**

This Assigned Commissioner Ruling (ACR) temporarily suspends renewal requirements for the California Universal Telephone Service Program (California LifeLine or Program) to ensure continued access to affordable communications services during the COVID-19 outbreak. This temporary measure will go into effect on the date of this ACR and will continue for 90 days, unless the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) directs otherwise in a final decision.

This ACR also seeks party comments, which may be filed and served no later than April 3, 2020.

1. Background

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist in the State of California as a result of the threat of COVID-19. On March 16, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-28-20, which included direction for the Commission to monitor measures by utility providers to implement customer services protections for critical utilities. On March 17, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-29-20 to temporarily suspend renewal requirements for 90 days for the following public

assistance programs: Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKs, Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants, California Food Assistance Program, and In Home Supportive Services.

On March 17, 2020, in response to the public health emergency associated with the COVID-19 outbreak, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued Order DA 20-285 to temporarily waive the federal LifeLine program's recertification and reverification requirements for 60 days. The FCC further noted its intent to monitor the COVID-19 situation and determine whether any additional waiver of rules or deadlines are needed.

2. Temporary Suspension of Renewal Requirements

California LifeLine requires a participant to annually complete a renewal form prior to her/his anniversary date to verify continued eligibility for California LifeLine.¹

This Assigned Commissioner's Ruling temporarily suspends the renewal requirements for the Program. The Program will suspend the renewal process for all California LifeLine participants, including participants who do not meet federal LifeLine eligibility criteria. The Program will not de-enroll participants due to the renewal process during the suspension period.

This temporary suspension will be effective for 90 days from the date of this ACR, unless this effective period is modified by a Commission decision. The Commission will consider whether to ratify this ACR as soon as possible.

At the end of the extension period, Commission staff will work with the Administrator to implement a renewal process for those participants who were affected by the suspension.

¹ General Order 153, Sections 4.5, 5.5, and 6.1.2.

We take this action to ensure that California LifeLine participants will continue to have access to affordable communications services during the COVID-19 outbreak. This temporary measure will enable California LifeLine participants to continue to receive program benefits without interruption.

Across California, school closures, shelter-in-place orders, and other state and local measures to contain COVID-19 require Californians to rely more on communications services to continue to work and meet basic needs. We will consider continuing to suspend renewal requirements for a longer period, if needed, and potentially other measures to ensure continued access to the California LifeLine program during the COVID-19 outbreak.

3. Questions for Party Comments

We seek party comments on the following questions:

- a. How long should the Commission continue to suspend renewal requirements for California LifeLine? For example, should the Commission continue to suspend these requirements so long as the State of California suspends renewal requirements for other public assistance programs due to the COVID-19 outbreak, or for so long as the State of California remains in a State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 outbreak?
- b. Should the Commission adopt other measures to ensure continued access to California LifeLine during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Comments may be filed and served no later than April 3, 2020.

IT IS SO RULED.

Dated March 19, 2020, at San Francisco, California.

/s/ GENEVIEVE SHIROMA

Genevieve Shiroma
Assigned Commissioner