



**California Public Utilities Commission**  
**505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

Docket #: R.20-02-008

## **CPUC REVISES CALIFORNIA LIFELINE TO BETTER SERVE LOW-INCOME CUSTOMERS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

SAN FRANCISCO, October 8, 2020 – The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), in its ongoing efforts to improve access to affordable communications services for all Californians during this pandemic year, today have taken steps to increase access to broadband services to meet the needs of the California Universal Telephone Service Program (California LifeLine).

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the CPUC recognizes that California LifeLine participants need affordable and improved broadband offerings to meet their distance learning, telehealth, and other needs. The new subsidy amounts and service standards adopted in this Decision will increase access to no-cost and low-cost mobile broadband plans that meet Californians’ needs during the pandemic and beyond. California LifeLine participants will have new options for higher mobile data allowances and the program will also offer subsidies for Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services bundled with fixed broadband services.

“As the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored, having a robust and affordable connection is essential, yet far too often it is out of reach for many Californians. Today’s decision makes many needed reforms to improve the broadband services offered by our state’s chief program for ensuring low-income households are connected. These reforms will have the most impact if each of our state’s five largest broadband companies participate in the program. I urge their partnership so all low-income Californians have improved – if not free – affordable, high speed connections,” said CPUC President Marybel Batjer.

Today’s Decision will also reduce California LifeLine costs by up to \$9.2 million per year by eliminating subsidies for outdated wireline measured rate plans. Communications providers are



ordered to transition California LifeLine participants from measured rate plans to flat rate plans without disruptions in service or conversion fee.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored that broadband is a critical service and laid bare the depth of the digital divide in California and across the country. The LifeLine Program must support affordable choices for Californians across the state, including rural and urban Californians, households and individuals who need no-cost wireless services, and struggling families who need mobile family plans or fixed voice or broadband services. This Decision brings broadband service for the first time into our LifeLine proceeding as the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of broadband access for all Californians to support distance learning, telehealth, and working from home,” said Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma.

In March 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency in California as a result of the threat of COVID-19 and directed all California residents to shelter-in-place to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored that broadband is an essential service and shed more light on the digital divide in California and across the country.

Since the California LifeLine program started, the CPUC has consistently modernized and expanded the scope of the program to help low-income Californians. The California LifeLine program plays an important role in ensuring that low-income families have access to affordable telecommunications and broadband service.

The proposal voted on is available at

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M348/K229/348229583.PDF>.

Documents related to the proceeding are available at

[https://apps.cpuc.ca.gov/apex/f?p=401:56:0::NO:RP,57,RIR:P5\\_PROCEEDING\\_SELECT:R2002008](https://apps.cpuc.ca.gov/apex/f?p=401:56:0::NO:RP,57,RIR:P5_PROCEEDING_SELECT:R2002008).

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