



Lifeline Assistance:

August 9, 2019

(Revised Date)

Maryland Office of People's Counsel

www.opc.maryland.gov

410-767-8150; 1-800-207-4055

Contact OPC at DLInfo_OP@maryland.gov

LIFELINE

What is Lifeline?

Lifeline is a federal program that helps limited income consumers pay for telephone and internet service. The cost of the program is shared by all telephone customers. In Maryland the program is called Tel-Life.

How does Lifeline work?

The Lifeline program provides discounts for telephone or broadband service for eligible customers. Customers must apply to the program to get qualified. If you want to use the discount for your home phone, you can contact Verizon or Armstrong (in Cecil County). The discounts for Verizon can be found at the end of this Guide. The discount is \$9.25 per month. You only get the discount with a certified Lifeline service provider. The list of providers can be found at www.usac.org.

What services are covered by Lifeline?

You can apply Lifeline assistance to ONE of these options:

- Existing voice-fixed (home phone)
- Existing voice-mobile (cell phone)
- Standalone broadband (mobile or fixed)
- Existing or new bundles of voice (fixed or mobile) and broadband

What do “fixed,” “mobile” and “broadband” mean?

The rules use the term “fixed” to refer to a phone or broadband service that is wired into your home. The home phone is also called a “landline” or “wireline” phone, and the fixed broadband could include DSL Internet service over a telephone line. The term “mobile” is used to refer to voice or broadband service that moves with you – it is “mobile.” Here, “broadband” refers to Internet service. A cell phone may have voice-only service. If it has mobile broadband, you can access the internet on the phone.

What is the difference between a cell phone and a smart phone?

Every mobile phone is a cell phone. A cell phone offers voice and text services, and sometimes picture and video messaging.

A smart phone is a cell phone plus an operating system, so the device can perform many functions of a computer. A smart phone has a touchscreen and an operating system that lets you download applications (apps). It also lets you access the Internet, store data, and use emails and social network accounts. Phone companies sell different types of data plans with their phones – the more data you can use, the more you pay – and it can add up really quickly.

Will I automatically get Internet as part of my Lifeline package?

No. You may choose to apply your discount to broadband or bundled services, but it is not automatic.

Are there minimum service standards?

Lifeline service providers must meet the following certain minimum standards:

- For mobile phones – at least 1000 minutes per month.
- For mobile internet – speed of 3G or better and usage of at least 2G per month.
- For home internet – speed of 18/2Mbps and usage of at least 1000GB per month.
- For bundled services – at least one of the services (voice or internet) must meet the minimum standards for that service.

Do Lifeline service providers have to offer devices (landline, wireless, or smart phones) at no cost?

No. The Lifeline Program does not cover the cost of devices. A customer must pay for the devices, unless the provider offers you a free phone at its expense. Wireless providers often provide free cell phones.

Do Lifeline service providers have to offer a WiFi-enabled phone?

Yes. Each provider is required to offer at least one WiFi-Enabled Phone. Wi-Fi enabled means that a device can receive and transmit wireless signals through the use of a Wi-Fi network. Personal computers, mobile phones, tablets, digital cameras and video-game console systems are often Wi-Fi enabled. This allows you to access the Internet.

Are there any future changes coming to Lifeline?

Yes. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted a Lifeline reform program in 2016. The reform program will gradually transition the Lifeline program to a broadband-only program. Key changes to the program include annual updates for broadband usage allowances and broadband speed requirements. Additionally, Lifeline support for voice support will be gradually eliminated on the following schedule:

- December 1, 2019 – Lifeline voice support will decrease to \$7.25.
- December 1, 2020 – Lifeline voice support will decrease to \$5.25.
- December 1, 2021 – Lifeline voice support will be eliminated.

ELIGIBILITY

What are the eligibility criteria?

You are eligible for Lifeline if you:

*Earn 135 percent or less of the federal poverty limit, **OR**

*Participate in one of these programs:

- Food Supplement Program (SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
- Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension
- Certain Tribal programs

What are the Lifeline program rules?

Key Lifeline rules include:

- Only one Lifeline benefit is allowed per household. A household is any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses.
- A resident in a group home, nursing home, assisted living or similar facility can be certified as one household.
- A household is not permitted to receive Lifeline service from more than one provider. Violation of the one-per-household rule will result in de-enrollment.
- There is an annual re-certification requirement.
- A Lifeline customer cannot transfer the benefit to any other person.

How do I sign up for new Lifeline services?

You will sign up through the company directly. Many companies advertise their

Lifeline services, or you may find a list at www.usac.org. When you sign up for Lifeline, you will need to provide the following information:

- Full legal name,
- Date of birth,
- Last four digits of Social Security number, AND
- Address

You will also need to provide one of the following:

- Valid ID, such as a Driver's License,
- Social security card,
- Medicaid card,
- Prior year's tax return, OR
- Other proof of identity or address.

Once I enroll, can I transfer my Lifeline benefit from one Lifeline provider to another?

You may transfer your benefit to a different provider at any time. To do this, simply contact the new provider and ask them to transfer your Lifeline benefit. The provider will need the following information to complete your request:

- Full legal name,
- Date of birth,
- Last four digits of Social Security number,
- Address,
- Phone number, AND
- Your consent (verbal or written).

DISPUTES

What if I have problems with a Lifeline provider? Where do I make a complaint?

First, you should contact the Provider to try to resolve the problem. If you are not satisfied, you can contact:

Office of the Attorney General of Maryland
Consumer Protection Division
200 St. Paul Place
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-576-6550
410-528-8662 Consumer Mediation Unit
hotline
1-888-743-0023 Attorney General's main
switchboard (toll-free)
E-mail: consumer@oag.state.md.us

You can also contact the Maryland Public Service Commission:
PSC Office of External Relations
6 St. Paul Street, 16th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-767-8028
1-800-492-0474 (Press "0" and ask for "OER")
www.psc.state.md.us (online complaint)

The Maryland Public Service Commission certifies Lifeline providers and has regulatory authority over landline voice providers. It does not have regulatory authority over wireless or broadband providers.

If you have a complaint about deceptive or misleading advertising or contracts, contact the Office of Attorney General of Maryland, as listed above.

For more general information on the Lifeline program, contact the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) www.usac.org.

For questions about the Lifeline program or this guide, contact OPC at www.opc.maryland.gov or DLInfo_OPC@Maryland.gov.

CHARGES FOR VERIZON LIFELINE SERVICE

Landline (Wired) Services: Verizon

Basic:	Single telephone line with a maximum of 30 un-timed local calls per month. Charge: \$0.66 per month You cannot have any premium services and must pay all applicable federal, state and local taxes. You will be charged for additional calls.
Enhanced:	Single telephone line with unlimited local calls. Customer may purchase two value-added services. Customers must pay all applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Charge: \$10.00 per month
Broadband:	Monthly discount of \$9.25