

## NEWS RELEASE

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### ***NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION ISSUES ORDER REQUIRING EXPANDED LIFELINE AND LINK-UP SERVICES***

The North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) issued an Order today requiring expanded Lifeline and Link-Up services in North Carolina.

Lifeline is a program which provides eligible low income telephone subscribers a monthly reduction in their local telephone rate. Link-Up is a program which provides eligible low income subscribers a 50% reduction in charges for commencing primary residential telephone service up to a maximum reduction of \$30.00.

The NCUC's Order requires changes to the Lifeline and Link-Up programs which are mandated under the May 8, 1997 Universal Service Order as issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in order for eligible telecommunications carriers to receive support for participating in Lifeline and Link-Up, beginning January 1, 1998. The NCUC's Order is interim and allows for parties to file objections no later than November 14, 1997. Withstanding substantial objections, the Commission's Order will become permanent.

For Lifeline, the NCUC ordered that intrastate rates be reduced by \$1.75 per Lifeline subscriber to allow a maximum level of Lifeline support in North Carolina. It also decreed that a matching level of intrastate support of \$3.50 be continued in North Carolina, thus allowing a total state and federal contribution per Lifeline consumer of \$10.50 per month. Eligibility criteria for Lifeline support had been limited to subscribers participating in the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) welfare programs. However, the NCUC in its Order expanded the Lifeline criteria to include consumers enrolled in the Food Stamps program in North Carolina.

For Link-Up, the NCUC ordered that support should continue at \$30.00 or one-half the carrier's customary residential connection charge, whichever is less. Eligibility criteria for Link-Up remain the same, and include subscribers participating in the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and the Food Stamps program.

The NCUC's Order in this proceeding may be viewed at the North Carolina Utilities Commission's website at <http://www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/>.