

FCC Seeks Federal-State Joint Board's Guidance on Administering Lifeline and Link Up

Legal Alert
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Garvey Schubert Barer Legal Update, May 17, 2010.

The FCC has asked the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) to review the FCC's eligibility, verification, and outreach rules for the Lifeline and Link Up universal service programs, which currently provide discounts on telephone service for low-income customers. See *In the Matter of Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Lifeline and Link Up*, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109, Order (rel. May 4, 2010).

Specifically, the FCC has asked the Joint Board to recommend any changes to certain aspects of the Lifeline and Link Up programs that may be necessary, given significant technological and marketplace changes since the current rules were adopted, based on consideration of: (1) the combination of federal and state rules that govern which customers are eligible to receive discounts through the Lifeline and Link Up programs; (2) best practices among states for effective and efficient verification of customer eligibility, both at initial customer sign-up and periodically thereafter; (3) appropriateness of various outreach and enrollment programs; and (4) the potential expansion of the low-income program to broadband, as recommended in the National Broadband Plan.

Among other things, the FCC asks the Joint Board to undertake a thorough review of the existing consumer eligibility requirements, as well as the certification and documentation requirements on eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs); to consider what steps the FCC and the states should take to ensure that a low-income consumer is not receiving supported service from multiple ETCs; and to consider whether the FCC should adopt a consistent set of document retention rules for all ETCs, whether operating in states maintaining their own low-income programs or in federal default states.

The FCC has requested that the Joint Board prepare a recommended decision regarding these issues and submit its decision to FCC within six months of May 4, 2010.