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SB-1212 “2-1-1” information and referral network. (2015-2016)

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Senate Bill No. 1212

CHAPTER 841

An act to amend Section 280 of the Public Utilities Code, relating to telecommunications.

[Approved by Governor September 29, 2016. Filed with Secretary of State September 29, 2016.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1212, Hueso. “2-1-1” information and referral network.

Under existing law, the Public Utilities Commission has regulatory authority over public utilities, including telephone corporations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), pursuant to its existing authority over the North American Numbering Plan, has established several abbreviated dialing codes, including designating the number 9-1-1 for persons to dial to obtain emergency services, designating the number 3-1-1 for persons to dial for nonemergency police assistance, and designating the number 2-1-1 for persons to dial to obtain information about, and referral to, community social services. Pursuant to authority delegated by the FCC to state regulatory bodies and its existing statutory authority, the Public Utilities Commission has established procedures for implementing 2-1-1 dialing in California.

This bill would state the intent of the Legislature to facilitate the expansion of 2-1-1 services into those counties in California where they are lacking and to support a comprehensive statewide database that will connect all callers to information and referrals they need. The bill would additionally state the intent of the Legislature to facilitate access to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information, and referral services, uniformly in the state, especially in hard-to-serve rural areas, through a universally available telephone service.

Existing law requires the commission to develop, implement, and administer a program to advance universal service by providing discounted rates to qualifying schools, community colleges, libraries, hospitals, health clinics, and community organizations. Existing law requires that all revenues collected by telephone corporations in rates authorized by the commission to fund this program be deposited in the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund. Existing law provides that moneys in the fund are held in trust and may be expended only upon appropriation in the annual Budget Act or upon supplemental appropriation and requires that all moneys appropriated to the commission from the fund be used exclusively for the program.

If the commission determines that doing so is an appropriate use of funds collected from ratepayers, the bill would, until January 1, 2023, authorize the commission to expend up to \$1,500,000 from the fund to help close 2-1-1 service gaps in counties lacking access to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information and referral services, where technically feasible, through available 2-1-1 service.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) In order to create a statewide disaster preparedness, response, and recovery system and to facilitate the reach of local services to vulnerable populations, this act is established to expand 2-1-1 services to all areas of California that do not currently have access to this vital service.

(2) 2-1-1 service is a free, accessible, three-digit telephone number that gives everyone in covered areas access to needed community services. First established in 2005, 2-1-1 service now covers 38 California counties. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, allowing residents to access information about health and human services, emergency care, crisis intervention, and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery when they need it most.

(3) 2-1-1 service is a natural hub for disaster-related information and plays a critical role during emergencies and disasters, such as fires, floods, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, and epidemics, reducing nonemergency call volume on 9-1-1 lines, which frees up emergency responders to deal with true life-or-death situations, thus leveraging local public safety resources.

(4) 2-1-1 service also increases the reach of government, nonprofit, and community programs by offering callers information on and access to a variety of health and human services, rent and utility assistance, physical and mental health resources, employment opportunities, support for older Americans and persons with disabilities, and support for families with special needs.

(5) 2-1-1 service call centers are staffed with highly trained specialists who have expertise in navigating the web of health and human services in a particular community and who have up-to-date information and guidance for callers in times of disaster.

(6) 2-1-1 service call center specialists are able to answer calls in over 150 different languages; they are able to provide critical health information to otherwise hard-to-reach ethnic populations.

(7) Twenty rural counties in California currently do not have access to 2-1-1 services, creating holes in referral services and disaster response capability.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature, in enacting this act, to facilitate the expansion of 2-1-1 services into those counties in California where they are lacking and to support a comprehensive statewide database that will connect all callers to the information and referrals they need.

(c) It is the intent of the Legislature to facilitate access to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information, and referral services, uniformly in the state, especially in hard-to-serve rural areas, through a universally available 2-1-1 telephone service.

SEC. 2. Section 280 of the Public Utilities Code is amended to read:

280. (a) The commission shall develop, implement, and administer a program to advance universal service by providing discounted rates to qualifying schools maintaining kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive, community colleges, libraries, hospitals, health clinics, and community organizations, consistent with Chapter 278 of the Statutes of 1994.

(b) There is hereby created the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee, which is an advisory board to advise the commission regarding the development, implementation, and administration of a program to advance universal service by providing discounted rates to qualifying schools maintaining kindergarten or any of grades 1 to 12, inclusive, community colleges, libraries, hospitals, health clinics, and community organizations, consistent with Chapter 278 of the Statutes of 1994, and to carry out the program pursuant to the commission's direction, control, and approval.

(c) All revenues collected by telephone corporations in rates authorized by the commission to fund the program specified in subdivision (a) shall be submitted to the commission pursuant to a schedule established by the commission. The commission shall transfer the moneys received to the Controller for deposit in the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund. All interest earned by moneys in the fund shall be deposited in the fund.

(d) Except as provided in subdivisions (e) and (g), moneys appropriated from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund to the commission shall be utilized exclusively by the commission for the program specified in subdivision (a), including all costs of the board and the commission associated with the administration and oversight of the program and the fund.

(e) Moneys loaned from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund in the Budget Act of 2003 are subject to Section 16320 of the Government Code. If the commission determines a need for moneys in the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund, the commission shall notify the Director of Finance of the need, as specified in Section 16320 of the Government Code. The commission may not increase the rates authorized by the commission to fund the program specified in subdivision (b) while moneys loaned from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund in the Budget Act of 2003 are outstanding unless both of the following conditions are satisfied:

(1) The Director of Finance, after making a determination pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 16320 of the Government Code, does not order repayment of all or a portion of any loan from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund within 30 days of notification by the commission of the need for the moneys.

(2) The commission notifies the Director of Finance and the Chairperson of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee in writing that it intends to increase the rates authorized by the commission to fund the program specified in subdivision (a). The notification required pursuant to this paragraph shall be made 30 days in advance of the intended rate increase.

(f) Subdivision (e) shall become inoperative upon full repayment or discharge of all moneys loaned from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund in the Budget Act of 2003.

(g) (1) Consistent with Decision 11-09-016 (September 8, 2011) Decision Granting Authority to Provide Emergency Access to 211 Services in Counties and Localities Without Existing 211 Centers and to Appoint a 211 Lead Entity, if it determines that doing so is an appropriate use of funds collected from ratepayers, the commission may expend up to one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) from the California Teleconnect Fund Administrative Committee Fund for one-time costs to help close 2-1-1 service gaps in counties lacking access to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information and referral services, where technically feasible, through available 2-1-1 service. As the lead agency appointed by the commission in Decision 11-09-016, 2-1-1 California may apply to the commission for use of the funds in the counties that lack 2-1-1 service. If the commission determines that doing so is an appropriate use of funds collected from ratepayers, these costs may include local implementation of a coordinated database that is owned by a city or county to provide referrals to help with nonemergency aspects of disaster planning, recovery, and response.

(2) This subdivision shall become inoperative on January 1, 2023.