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AB-74 Communications: universal service: lifeline program. (2021-2022)

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Assembly Bill No. 74

CHAPTER 410

An act to add Section 878.6 to the Public Utilities Code, relating to communications.

[Approved by Governor September 30, 2021. Filed with Secretary of State September 30, 2021.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 74, Lorena Gonzalez. Communications: universal service: lifeline program.

Under the California Constitution and the Public Utilities Act, the Public Utilities Commission has regulatory authority over public utilities, including telephone corporations. The act establishes the Universal Lifeline Telephone Service program (lifeline program) in order to provide low-income households with access to affordable basic residential telephone service.

This bill would require the commission, before March 1, 2022, to adopt updated rules for the lifeline program establishing a modified recertification process that minimizes barriers to lifeline subscriber recertification and reduces the burden and cost of recertification on the lifeline program, as specified. The bill would require the commission, in consultation with lifeline service providers, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Universal Service Administrative Company, before January 1, 2023, to adopt updated rules for the lifeline program with the goal of achieving recertification rates at least equivalent to those rates achieved for the federal lifeline program. The bill would require the commission to annually publicly report on its internet website the participation and recertification rates of eligible lifeline subscribers.

Under existing law, a violation of the act or any order, decision, rule, direction, demand, or requirement of the commission is a crime.

Because the provisions of this bill would be a part of the act and because a violation of an order, decision, rule, direction, demand, or requirement of the commission implementing its requirements would be a crime, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

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

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

SECTION 1. Section 878.6 is added to the Public Utilities Code, to read:

878.6. (a) (1) Before March 1, 2022, the commission shall, as part of an existing proceeding, adopt updated rules for the lifeline program establishing a modified recertification process that minimizes barriers to lifeline subscriber recertification and reduces the burden and cost of recertification on the lifeline program.

(2) The updated rules adopted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall do all of the following:

(A) Enable a lifeline subscriber to enroll in the lifeline program directly online using an electronic signature.

(B) Enable a lifeline subscriber to complete the annual recertification of lifeline eligibility process directly online using an electronic signature, or by telephone using a telephonic signature. The lifeline program's third-party administrator shall verify the lifeline subscriber's identity using the personally identifiable information that the administrator has on file. The commission shall not require a lifeline subscriber to use a commission-issued personal identification number (PIN) for identity verification.

(C) Provide an option for lifeline subscribers to receive communications regarding their lifeline subscription in an electronic format, including, but not limited to, email and short message service.

(b) Before January 1, 2023, the commission shall, as part of an existing proceeding and in consultation with lifeline service providers, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Universal Service Administrative Company, adopt updated rules for the lifeline program with the goal of achieving recertification rates at least equivalent to those rates achieved by the Universal Services Administrative Company as the administrator for the federal lifeline program.

(c) The commission shall annually publicly report on its internet website the participation and recertification rates of eligible lifeline subscribers.

SEC. 2. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.