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STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA  
BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Chairman  
Commissioner  
Commissioner

**RECEIVED**  
MAY 11 2005  
SOUTH DAKOTA  
UTILITIES COMMISSION

IN THE MATTER OF THE REVIEW OF  
IMPLEMENTATION OF FCC REQUIREMENTS  
FOR LIFELINE AND LINK-UP PROGRAMS  
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
ADDITIONAL OUTREACH EFFORTS.

Docket No. TC 05-058

Heartland Telecommunications Company of Iowa d/b/a HickoryTech submits the following comments in response to the Commission's request for information in the review of implementation of FCC requirements for Lifeline and Link-up programs and the development of additional outreach efforts. The Commission in its April 15, 2005 Order Opening Docket and Requesting Information requested responses on the following issues:

1. The ETC's lifeline and link-up forms and promotional material;
2. A description of how the ETC advertises lifeline and link-up, including the form of advertisement;
3. How the ETC is implementing the new certification procedures;
4. How the ETC is implementing the new verification procedures.

Background

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in its Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed rulemaking, FCC 04-87 dated April 29, 2004 (Lifeline Order) requires state commissions and eligible telecommunications carriers (ETC) to adopt verification procedures to annually verify the continued eligibility of Lifeline consumers. The verification procedure must be "targeted to provide support only to eligible consumers". As a part of its Lifeline Order the FCC has set forth a specific procedure of statistically valid sampling that can be used for verification in addition to criteria that can be used to determine continued consumer eligibility.

## Response

Heartland Telecommunications Company of Iowa d/b/a HickoryTech provides service to approximately 12,700 customers, the majority of whom live in Iowa. About 290 of our customers are served within the South Dakota border exchanges of West Akron and West Hawarden, in northeastern South Dakota. Heartland is enclosing a copy of its LifeLine and Link-up form, along with the customer information cover letter. These forms are mailed to customers upon request.

Heartland advertises the Low Income Telephone Assistance Programs in its annual directory publication for the Heartland Exchange areas (see attached). In addition, when a Iowa customer participates in a qualifying Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the ETC is notified by that office to establish Lifeline credits for the customer. Inversely, when a customer no longer receives LIHEAP assistance, the ETC is notified to remove the Lifeline credits.


Heartland establishes Lifeline credits on customer accounts in response to lists remitted by the Iowa LIHEAP offices and when a completed Lifeline/Link-up Low-Income Telephone Assistance Application is received containing a signature self-certifying that all information is true.

Heartland has not implemented specific verifications procedures to date. The Iowa Utilities Board has requested clarification from the FCC on the verification process due to the established state practice that already provides verification in its procedure. To date, Heartland has one South Dakota customer receiving Lifeline credits that began in Feb 2005, current enough to eliminate a need for any additional self-certification.

Heartland Telecommunications Company of Iowa d/b/a HickoryTech appreciates this opportunity to provide the Commission with this required information.

Dated: May 9, 2005

Respectfully Submitted,

By   
William VanderSluis  
Director of Regulatory  
HickoryTech

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Enclosures

# Low-Income Telephone Service Discount Programs

## Telephone Service Discounts

### Low-Income Telephone Service Discount Programs

The telephone company is authorized to provide two federally-funded and one state-funded telephone service discount programs that were designed to promote universal service by providing low-income individuals with new telephone service installations and monthly telephone service discounts.

The **Link-Up** program provides a discount on connection charges when installing new telephone service. The **Lifeline** and **Telephone Assistance Plan (TAP)** programs provide a monthly discount on your local service telephone bill.

### Who is eligible?

Telephone service must be in the applicant's name. The applicant must participate in at least one of the following public assistance programs to be eligible:

- Medicaid/Medical Assistance
- Food Support (food stamps)
- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Housing Assistance
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)

*For persons living on a reservation:*

- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance
- Tribally administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Head Start (only those meeting its income qualifying standard)
- National School Lunch Program's free lunch program

### What do the programs provide?

**LifeLine and TAP** provides eligible subscribers with a monthly credit on the basic service portion of their telephone bill. The credit applies on the main home telephone number listed in the applicant's name. Subscribers also may receive free blocking of long distance calling on their telephone line.

**Link-Up** provides eligible subscribers with reduced connection charges for their basic home telephone service. This reduction is 50 percent of applicable charges or \$30.00, whichever is less. Link-Up also provides for deferred payment of connection charges without interest. It does not cover the cost of wiring inside the home and is available to eligible subscribers only once per home address.

### How do I apply?

If you meet the eligibility requirements, complete and sign the application form and mail it to your local phone company. Applications are also available from all local phone companies.

### Could I become ineligible?

When you no longer participate in any of the qualifying programs listed above, you are no longer eligible for the discounts. You are obligated by law to notify the telephone company when you no longer participate in any of the qualifying programs.

### For more information

If you have questions about these discount programs, the application form or your telephone service, contact your local telephone company for more information.

**Complete the application and mail to your local telephone company**

## Low-Income Telephone Assistance Application

(Please print)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Phone number where you may be reached or receive messages: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions (indicate by check mark):

1. By filling out this application I (the applicant) request:

A. New Service:

\_\_\_\_\_ Low-income telephone connection assistance (Link-Up) and/or

\_\_\_\_\_ Low-income monthly telephone bill assistance (Lifeline)

B. Existing Service:

\_\_\_\_\_ Low-income monthly telephone bill assistance (Lifeline)

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you received telephone connection (Link-Up) assistance at the above address?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

*If the answer is "yes," you are not eligible to receive telephone connection (Link-Up) assistance.*

3. Are you currently participating in any of the following programs:

\_\_\_\_\_ Medicaid (e.g. Title XIX/Medical, State Supplemental Assistance)

\_\_\_\_\_ Food Stamps

\_\_\_\_\_ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

\_\_\_\_\_ Federal Public Housing Assistance

\_\_\_\_\_ Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

I understand completion of this application does not constitute immediate acceptance into this program. I agree to notify my telecommunications provider if I cease to participate in any of the public assistance programs I checked above.

I certify under penalty of perjury the above information is true. I have read the information on this application and understand I must meet the above qualifications to receive low-income telephone assistance through the Lifeline or Link-Up programs. This information may be shared with the public assistance program.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompt return of this application to your local telephone provider will ensure proper credits to your account.**

# Take! PHOTOBOOK

April 2004 to March 2005

Alkron	Elk Point	Lester	Rock Valley
Alcester	George	Little Rock	Sheldon
Alvord	Hawarden	Mallock	Sibley
Ashton	Hudson	Maurice	Sioux Center
Boydton	Hull	North Rock	Struble
Brunsville	Inwood	Rapids	West Akron
Chatsworth	Ireton	Ocheyedan	Westfield
Craig	Larchwood	Orange City	West
Doon	Lee Mars	Rock Rapids	Hawarden



## REPAIR SERVICE

I service and repair inquiries, call 1-866-HICKORY (1-866-442-5679).  
 je 1 for Customer Care Hours.

with your telephone service may  
 om these sources:

phone sets or equipment  
 ing inside your premises

phone company lines or equipment  
 you call repair service you can take  
 wing steps to determine the source  
 own telephone problems.

phone Equipment Problems  
 ou have more than one phone,  
 lug the one from which you detected  
 problem. Plug another phone into  
 jack and see if the problem still  
 ts. If it doesn't, chances are the  
 ble is in the first phone. The prob-  
 can also come from a stuck button  
 worn cord.

de Wire Problems (See WSP)  
 phone works in one jack and not  
 ther, your problem could be inside.  
 ck for loose or broken wire or jack.

ible Outside Your Premises  
 ou are unable to determine the  
 rce of your telephone trouble, call  
 omer Care at 1-866-HICKORY  
 66-442-5679).

### Repair Charges

No charge will be billed if:

- The trouble is in an outside phone wire on the telephone companies side of the test point and/or Network Interface Device.
- You subscribe to the Telephone Company's Wire Service Plan (some limitations apply).

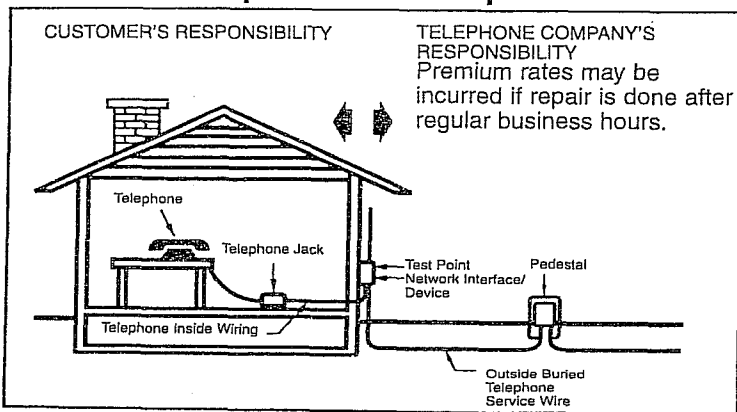
Otherwise, residential customers will be charged the hourly repair costs with a minimum of one-half hour and a trip charge. Business customers are subject to a one-hour minimum service charge.

### Wire Service Plan For Residential Customers (WSP)

The Wire Service Plan will save you a trip charge if the problem is in your inside wiring or jack(s). You'll also receive reduced hourly repair cost rates with the Wire Service Plan. A small monthly fee may prevent large repair bills. The Wire Service Plan is available on residential lines only during regular business hours. Monday - Friday 8:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. or Saturday 8:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Wire Service Plan Exclusions: The Wire Service Plan does not cover damage that is caused by or results from the customer's gross negligence, willful damage, use of substandard industry code wiring/equipment, improper installation or improper maintenance of inside telephone wire or jack(s) connected to the customer's service.

### Responsible For Repairs



**FOR LOCATION OF BURIED CABLE**  
 Before Digging or Trenching

## BILLING INFORMATION

### Payment Policies

Prompt payment of your telephone bill will protect your credit history and prevent temporary disconnection. When your account is thirty (30) days past due, your account is subject to disconnection and a late fee of \$3.00 plus 1.5% of any unpaid balance. If service is disconnected, the total amount owed must be paid and a Service Charge will be billed for reconnection. To ensure proper credit when paying your bill, make sure that the telephone number is clearly written on your check or money order. **DO NOT MAIL CASH.** The Telephone Company will not be responsible for cash payments that are mailed.

### Bills for Service

Although your bill may include charges from several different companies, you should make the entire payment to HickoryTech. Bills are issued monthly and are due within 20 days of presentation. Your bill will include local service charges for one month in advance from the date of the bill. If applicable, long distance charges in arrears are also included.

### Maintaining Good Credit

Paying each telephone bill promptly is important in order to maintain a good credit history. All payments are due by the Due Date printed on each statement. Past due accounts will be sent a disconnection notice at least five days prior to the scheduled disconnection date. If payment is not received, telephone service will be temporarily disconnected. A reconnection fee will be charged to your account for any disconnection. Payments made by check, returned by the bank, may result in immediate disconnection of service until the bill, reconnection charge and check handling fee are paid.

### Charges for Changes in My Service

All changes, except the termination of service or removal of calling features, result in a charge. The amount of the charge depends on the type of work that is required. A Customer Care Consultant can quote current charges for any changes. Based on your past credit history, you may be required to pay a deposit or an advanced payment. The service request may also be delayed until your bill is current.

### Billing Responsibility

Every customer is responsible for all long distance calls made from their phone, regardless of who places them. Please review your bill for accuracy before paying it and if you have any questions call the Customer Care Center at 1-866-HICKORY (1-866-442-5679).

### Automatic Payment Plans

You can pay your telephone bill through our Automatic Payment Plan. Your payment is automatically transferred from your checking or savings account each month. To sign up for this free service, call the Customer Care Center at 1-866-HICKORY (1-866-442-5679).

### Remittance

- PLEASE WRITE YOUR PHONE NUMBER ON YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER.
- ENCLOSE REMITTANCE SLIP WITH PAYMENT TO ENSURE PROPER CREDIT ON YOUR ACCOUNT.
- DO NOT MAIL CASH.

### Low Income Telephone Assistance Programs

Low-income telephone assistance is available for qualifying low-income customers. Contact the Customer Care Center for more information.

### Rates and Regulations

Rates and regulations which govern the services furnished by the Telephone Company and have been approved by the Iowa Public Utilities Board are on file in the Business Office. A Customer Care Consultant will be glad to assist you in obtaining information from the tariff.

### Resolving Complaints

If you have a problem or complaint with HickoryTech please contact us at 1-866-HICKORY (1-866-442-5679) or write to:

HickoryTech  
 221 E. Hickory Street  
 Mankato, MN 56001

If your problem is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may request assistance from the Iowa Utilities Division:

Utilities Division  
 350 Maple Street  
 Des Moines, IA 50319  
 (515) 281-3839 or toll-free (877) 565-4450  
 iubcustomer@max.state.ia.us