

THE EMPOWERMENT CENTER OF GREATER CLEVELAND

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Serving the Community Since 1966

January 16, 2007

Ms. Renee Jenkins
Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
Docketing Division
180 East Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

RE: Case Number: 02-3069-TP-ALT

Dear Ms. Jenkins:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our opinion regarding allowing Lifeline Ohio customers the choice of selecting vertical features. We support the present efforts of AT&T to eliminate current restrictions that prevent Lifeline customers from purchasing features such as Caller ID and 3-way calling. We find current rules to be restrictive and detrimental to enrolling customers in the program.

The Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland is one of the agencies located in Ohio that provides outreach support extending the Lifeline Ohio Program by assisting in the application process on behalf of AT&T. The individuals and families living on low incomes (including individuals from the Hispanic communities in Northeast Ohio), for which we provide services and assistance, need to have a landline phone for numerous reasons. Some are seeking employment opportunities; some are providing care to elderly relatives.

Current rules prevent Lifeline customers from purchasing services they want or that may be beneficial depending upon their circumstances. For example, a communication vendor may not be aware of the multitude of family circumstances impacting a particular individual or family at the moment they are determining the telecommunication services they require. Prohibiting individual choice in these circumstances may add to the family's or individual's distress unnecessarily when seeking communication related services.

It is our feeling that Lifeline enrollment would increase if these restrictions were eliminated. Just because someone may have limited financial resources, this does not mean they should be denied freedom of choice. We must work together to insure the best services are provided for those that require it. Steps that can be taken to simplify the rules and assist in improving enrollment should be pursued.

Customers must feel that they are treated equally. Personal choice should not be regulated when it comes to selecting a telephone service to meet their personal needs. Nor should the amount they choose to spend for the services be regulated. And finally, when we strive for personal independence and self-sufficiency, even individuals recognizing their financial limitations and personal needs, should not have to worry about a choice of service due to regulations prohibiting choice. With your help, Ohio can provide a discount for these customers and the ability to choose those services that best meet their individual needs. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,


Tom A. F. Mendelsohn

Executive Director


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