

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1428

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to the Washington telephone assistance program.

Brief Description: Removing the expiration date and correcting references for the Washington telephone assistance program.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Energy & Utilities (originally sponsored by Representatives Grant, Casada, Finkbeiner, Long, King and Jacobsen.)

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Energy & Utilities, February 18, 1993, DPS;
Passed House, March 8, 1993, 97-0;
Amended by Senate;
Passed Legislature, April 20, 1993, 97-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Grant, Chair; Finkbeiner, Vice Chair; Casada, Ranking Minority Member; Miller, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Johanson; Kessler; Kremen; Long; and Ludwig.

Staff: Ken Conte (786-7113).

Background: In 1987, the Legislature established a program to assist low-income persons in obtaining basic telephone services. The program, then known as the "Lifeline Assistance Program" and now known as the "Washington Telephone Assistance Program" (WTAP), is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

WTAP provides low-income persons with a 50 percent discount on connection fees and waives deposit requirements. Under the program, WTAP participants are charged a discounted flat rate for basic telephone service.

In order to be eligible for assistance under WTAP, a person must be an adult recipient of DSHS administered programs for the financially needy which provide continuing financial or

medical assistance, food stamps, or supportive services to persons in their homes.

WTAP is funded by an excise tax on all switched access lines and by funds available for this purpose from the federal government or other sources. There is a statutory ceiling of \$0.14 per month per line placed on the excise tax. The current rate, established by the Utilities and Transportation Commission, is \$0.13 per line per month.

The WTAP program expires on June 30, 1993, unless extended by the Legislature.

Summary of Bill: The Washington Telephone Assistance Program is extended until June 30, 1998. An outdated reference to "Lifeline Assistance Program" is updated to make reference to the Washington Telephone Assistance Program. A definition of "department" is inserted to clarify that references to "department" mean the Department of Social and Health Services.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The Washington Telephone Assistance Program is a good program which has helped countless people who would otherwise not be able to afford basic telephone service. This program should be allowed to continue indefinitely.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: (All pro): Bob Bratton, GTE; Dale Vincent, U.S. West; and Bernice Moorehead, Department of Social and Health Services.