

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6400

As Passed Senate, February 12, 1998

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

Brief Description: Extending the Washington telephone assistance program through 2003.

Sponsors: Senators Brown, Finkbeiner, Oke and Thibaudeau; by request of Department of Social and Health Services.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy & Utilities: 1/26/98, 2/2/98 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/12/98, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Finkbeiner, Chair; Hochstatter, Vice Chair; Brown, Jacobsen, Rossi, T. Sheldon and Strannigan.

Staff: Karen Kirkpatrick (786-7403)

Background: The Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP) expires on June 30, 1998, unless extended by the Legislature. It was originally created in 1987, as the Lifeline Assistance Program— to assist low-income persons in obtaining basic telephone services. The program was reauthorized by the Legislature in 1993. It is administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

In order to be eligible for assistance under WTAP, a person must be an adult recipient of DSHS administered programs for the financially needy. Participants receive a 50 percent discount on connection fees, deposit waivers, and are charged a discounted flat rate for basic telephone service.

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

Summary of Bill: The Washington Telephone Assistance Program is extended until June 30, 2003.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This legislation will continue a program established in 1987 to assist low-income persons in obtaining basic telephone services. This program provides service to 100,000 households at a nominal cost of \$.13 per line per month.

Testimony Against: None

Testified: John Atherton, DSHS (pro).