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HOUSE BILL 2643

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State of Washington                      56th Legislature                      2000 Regular Session

By Representatives Gombosky, D. Sommers, Wood and Tokuda

Read first time . Referred to Committee on .

1            AN ACT Relating to assisting eligible families to find housing and  
2 jobs through community voice mail services; amending RCW 80.36.005,  
3 80.36.410, 80.36.420, 80.36.430, 80.36.440, 80.36.450, 80.36.460,  
4 80.36.470, and 80.36.475; adding a new section to chapter 80.36 RCW;  
5 creating a new section; recodifying RCW 80.36.005; and providing an  
6 expiration date.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

8            NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that:

9            (a) The lack of a reliable telephone number for receiving calls  
10 presents significant barriers to obtaining employment, housing, medical  
11 care, and social services;

12            (b) Assisting current and former welfare recipients, other low-wage  
13 workers, and homeless people to find employment, housing, medical care,  
14 and social services is critical to the success of the state's welfare  
15 reform efforts; and

16            (c) Community service voice mail has a proven record of improving  
17 recipients' success in finding employment and housing, and in accessing  
18 medical care and social services compared to clients without access to  
19 reliable telephone numbers.

1 (2) The legislature therefore intends to expand the availability of  
2 community service voice mail programs by establishing community service  
3 voice mail as a component of the Washington telephone assistance  
4 program.

5 **Sec. 2.** RCW 80.36.005 and 1993 c 249 s 1 are each amended to read  
6 as follows:

7 ~~((As used in this chapter))~~ The definitions in this section apply  
8 throughout RCW 80.36.410 through 80.36.475, unless the context  
9 ~~((indicates))~~ clearly requires otherwise((~~7~~)).

10 (1) "Community action agency" means local community action agencies  
11 or local community service agencies designated by the department of  
12 community, trade, and economic development under chapter 43.63A RCW.

13 (2) "Community service voice mail" means a computerized telephone  
14 answering service with the capabilities described in RCW 80.36.420(4).

15 (3) "Department" means the department of social and health  
16 services.

17 **Sec. 3.** RCW 80.36.410 and 1987 c 229 s 3 are each amended to read  
18 as follows:

19 (1) The legislature finds that universal telephone service is an  
20 important policy goal of the state. The legislature further finds  
21 that: (a) Recent changes in the telecommunications industry, such as  
22 federal access charges, raise concerns about the ability of low-income  
23 persons to continue to afford access to local exchange telephone  
24 service; and (b) many low-income persons do not have a permanent  
25 residence in which to receive local exchange telephone service.

26 (2) Therefore, the legislature finds that: (a) It is in the public  
27 interest to take steps to mitigate the effects of these changes on low-  
28 income persons; and (b) advances in telecommunications technologies,  
29 such as community service voice mail, provide new and economically  
30 efficient ways to secure many of the benefits of universal service to  
31 low-income persons who are not customers of local exchange telephone  
32 service.

33 **Sec. 4.** RCW 80.36.420 and 1990 c 170 s 2 are each amended to read  
34 as follows:

35 The Washington telephone assistance program shall be available to  
36 ~~((participants))~~ eligible clients of department programs ~~((set forth in~~

1 ~~RCW 80.36.470~~) and community action agency services, except that  
2 clients of community action agency services shall be eligible only for  
3 the community service voice mail described in subsection (4) of this  
4 section. Assistance shall consist of the following components:

5 (1) A discount on service connection fees of fifty percent or more  
6 as set forth in RCW 80.36.460.

7 (2) A waiver of deposit requirements on local exchange service, as  
8 set forth in RCW 80.36.460.

9 (3) A discounted flat rate service for local exchange service,  
10 which shall be subject to the following conditions:

11 (a) The commission shall establish a single telephone assistance  
12 rate for all local exchange companies operating in the state of  
13 Washington. The telephone assistance rate shall include any federal  
14 end user access charges and any other charges necessary to obtain local  
15 exchange service.

16 (b) The commission shall, in establishing the telephone assistance  
17 rate, consider all charges for local exchange service, including  
18 federal end user access charges, mileage charges, extended area  
19 service, and any other charges necessary to obtain local exchange  
20 service.

21 (c) The telephone assistance rate shall only be available to  
22 eligible customers subscribing to the lowest available local exchange  
23 flat rate service, where the lowest local exchange flat rate, including  
24 any federal end user access charges and any other charges necessary to  
25 obtain local exchange service, is greater than the telephone assistance  
26 rate. Low-income senior citizens sixty years of age and older and  
27 other low-income persons identified by the department as medically  
28 needy shall, where single-party service is available, be provided with  
29 single-party service as the lowest available local exchange flat rate  
30 service.

31 (d) The cost of providing the service shall be paid, to the maximum  
32 extent possible, by a waiver of all or part of the federal end user  
33 access charge and, to the extent necessary, from the telephone  
34 assistance fund created by RCW 80.36.430.

35 (4) A community service voice mailbox that provides recipients  
36 with: (a) An individually assigned telephone number; (b) the ability  
37 to record a personal greeting; and (c) a secure private security code  
38 to retrieve messages. The community service voice mailbox may also

1 include a toll-free line through which recipients can access their  
2 community service voice mailboxes at no charge.

3 **Sec. 5.** RCW 80.36.430 and 1990 c 170 s 3 are each amended to read  
4 as follows:

5 (1) The Washington telephone assistance program shall be funded by  
6 a telephone assistance excise tax on all switched access lines and by  
7 funds from any federal government or other programs for this purpose.  
8 Switched access lines are defined in RCW 82.14B.020. The telephone  
9 assistance excise tax shall be applied equally to all residential and  
10 business access lines not to exceed fourteen cents per month. The  
11 telephone assistance excise tax shall be separately identified on each  
12 ratepayer's bill as the "Washington telephone assistance program." All  
13 money collected from the telephone assistance excise tax shall be  
14 transferred to a telephone assistance fund administered by the  
15 department.

16 (2) The department shall be the fund administrator for local  
17 exchange companies, and the department of community, trade, and  
18 economic development shall be the fund administrator for community  
19 action agencies. Local exchange companies and community action  
20 agencies shall bill ((the)) their fund administrator for their expenses  
21 incurred in offering the telephone assistance program, including  
22 administrative and program expenses.

23 (3) The department shall disburse the money to the local exchange  
24 companies and to the department of community, trade, and economic  
25 development, except that the total amount of funds that may be paid  
26 annually to the department of community, trade, and economic  
27 development shall not exceed ten percent of the total annual telephone  
28 assistance fund revenues collected. The department is exempted from  
29 having to conclude a contract with local exchange companies in order to  
30 effect this reimbursement. The department of community, trade, and  
31 economic development shall disburse the money to the community action  
32 agencies.

33 (4) The ((department)) fund administrators shall recover ((its))  
34 their administrative costs from the fund. The ((department)) fund  
35 administrator may specify by rule the range and extent of  
36 administrative and program expenses that will be reimbursed to local  
37 exchange companies or community action agencies.

1       **Sec. 6.** RCW 80.36.440 and 1990 c 170 s 4 are each amended to read  
2 as follows:

3       (1) The commission ((and)), the department, and the department of  
4 community, trade, and economic development may adopt any rules  
5 necessary to implement RCW 80.36.410 through 80.36.470.

6       (2) The rules relating to community service voice mail shall  
7 identify funding priorities that extend the benefits of community  
8 service voice mail to the greatest number of eligible clients. Within  
9 available resources, funding shall be made available for: (a)  
10 Deployment of new community service voice mail systems, including costs  
11 for start-up and installation, staff to train participating agencies,  
12 and maintaining program data; (b) installation of toll-free lines  
13 through which recipients of existing community service voice mail can  
14 access their community service voice mailboxes at no charge; (c)  
15 expansion of the capacity of existing community service voice mail; and  
16 (d) payment for continuing and expanding telephone services of existing  
17 community service voice mail, including maintenance expenses, operating  
18 expenses, and administrative expenses. The rules may require community  
19 action agencies to match up to fifty percent of the funds received from  
20 the telephone assistance program or to demonstrate the acquisition of  
21 in-kind contributions from local exchange companies or vendors of  
22 community service voice mail hardware or software.

23       **Sec. 7.** RCW 80.36.450 and 1993 c 249 s 2 are each amended to read  
24 as follows:

25       The Washington telephone assistance program shall be limited to one  
26 residential access line per eligible household for services provided by  
27 local exchange companies or to one community service voice mailbox per  
28 eligible person for services provided by community action agencies.

29       **Sec. 8.** RCW 80.36.460 and 1990 c 170 s 5 are each amended to read  
30 as follows:

31       (1) Local exchange companies shall file tariffs with the commission  
32 which waive deposits on local exchange service for eligible subscribers  
33 and which establish a fifty percent discount on service connection fees  
34 for eligible subscribers. Part or all of the remaining fifty percent  
35 of service connection fees may be paid by funds from federal government  
36 or other programs for this purpose. The commission or other  
37 appropriate agency shall make timely application for any available

1 federal funds. The remaining portion of the connection fee to be paid  
2 by the subscriber shall be expressly payable by installment fees spread  
3 over a period of months. A subscriber may, however, choose to pay the  
4 connection fee in a lump sum. Costs associated with the waiver and  
5 discount shall be accounted for separately and recovered from the  
6 telephone assistance fund. Eligible subscribers shall be allowed one  
7 waiver of a deposit and one discount on service connection fees per  
8 year.

9 (2) Community action agencies may not charge recipients for  
10 community service voice mail.

11 **Sec. 9.** RCW 80.36.470 and 1990 c 170 s 6 are each amended to read  
12 as follows:

13 (1) Adult recipients of department-administered programs for the  
14 financially needy which provide continuing financial or medical  
15 assistance, food stamps, or supportive services to persons in their own  
16 homes are eligible for participation in the telephone assistance  
17 program. The department shall notify the participants of their  
18 eligibility.

19 (2) Adult clients of community action agency services are eligible  
20 for participation in the community service voice mail of the telephone  
21 assistance program if they do not reside in a residence with local  
22 exchange telephone service or do not have a reliable means of directly  
23 receiving telephone calls or messages.

24 **Sec. 10.** RCW 80.36.475 and 1990 c 170 s 7 are each amended to read  
25 as follows:

26 The department shall report to the ~~((energy and utilities))~~  
27 committees of the house of representatives and the senate with  
28 jurisdiction over telecommunications services by December 1 of each  
29 year on the status of the Washington telephone assistance program. The  
30 report shall include the number of participants by qualifying ~~((social~~  
31 ~~service))~~ department or community action agency programs receiving  
32 benefits from the telephone assistance program and the type of benefits  
33 participants receive. The report shall also include a description of  
34 the geographical distribution of participants, the program's annual  
35 revenue and expenditures, and any recommendations for legislative  
36 action.

1        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 11.**    RCW 80.36.005 is recodified as a new  
2 section in chapter 80.36 RCW to be codified immediately before RCW  
3 80.36.410.

4        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 12.**    Sections 3 through 9 of this act expire  
5 June 30, 2003.

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