

FINAL BILL REPORT

SB 5999

C 104 L 02
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Modifying the telephone assistance program.

Sponsors: Senators B. Sheldon, Fairley, Carlson, Snyder, Rossi, Costa, Eide, Kline and Winsley.

Senate Committee on Economic Development & Telecommunications
House Committee on Technology, Telecommunications & Energy
House Committee on Appropriations

Background: The Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP) has been operating since 1987 to help provide telephone services to low-income residents of the state. The program, operated by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC), provides for a reduced monthly charge for basic telephone service, discounts on connection fees, and waivers of deposits for local service.

Households are eligible if they have an adult recipient of one or more types of public assistance administered by DSHS. The program currently serves approximately 24 percent of the eligible households.

The program is funded exclusively by a \$.13 excise tax on all switched telephone lines in the state. In fiscal year 2001, the excise tax receipts collected from participating telephone companies were \$5.76 million, and program costs were \$5.95 million. The unreconciled fund balance at the end of the program year was \$7.6 million.

Community voice mail is a computerized telephone answering system that can act like a home answering machine for hundreds or thousands of people in a community. It can provide recipients with an individual telephone number and a voice mailbox where they can record a personal greeting and access their messages from any location, even if they do not have traditional telephone service.

Currently eight Washington cities are operating community voice mail programs through their local community action agencies, primarily for low-income and homeless people who are searching for employment or are working under other case management plans.

Summary: A new class of eligible recipients is added for the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP). Participants of community service voice mail programs are eligible for WTAP services after completion of the voice mail program. Their period of eligibility lasts for the remainder of the current WTAP service year and the following service year.

Community agencies that administer community service voice mail programs must notify the Department of Social and Health Services of participants who are eligible under this provision.

Relevant definitions are included.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	49	0
House	93	0

Effective: June 13, 2002