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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
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Michigan House of Representatives
State Capitol Building
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Representatives,

Today I signed Enrolled House Bill 5263. For years, Michigan has required telecom companies to offer a subsidy to qualifying customers for landline service through its “Lifeline” program, which supplements the federal Lifeline subsidy for voice, mobile, and broadband services. In recent years, the number of customers taking advantage of this subsidy for landline services has fallen over 95%, to under 6,000 people in Michigan. That reflects the transition toward mobile communication, and away from landline service. As a result, the benefits of our Lifeline program have dwindled, while the cost of ensuring compliance remains high. House Bill 5263 will reduce the cost of compliance in the short-term by aligning eligibility criteria for the Lifeline program with federal criteria. And it will allow telecom companies to opt out of the state program beginning in 2022.

In light of recent technological advancements, we must ensure that low-income Michiganders have access to the communication services that define participation in modern life. That is why I am calling on all Michigan telecom companies to ensure a smooth transition as the Lifeline program evolves at the state and federal levels.

First, I’ve asked all carriers to coordinate with the Michigan Public Service Commission to accurately map the availability of providers offering Lifeline to help customers easily identify their assistance options as more customers shift from landline to wireless, broadband, or bundled services. Second, I’ve asked all landline carriers to proactively notify customers—well in advance of deadlines in the new statute—of changes in assistance and availability of other services or providers, as needed, given the phase out of voice-only Lifeline. Finally, I’ve asked carriers to partner with my office and the MPSC to advocate at the federal level for continued availability of Lifeline for voice-only service after December 2021, to the extent there are potential gaps in coverage for Michigan residents.

I am pleased to announce that AT&T and Frontier Communications have already agreed to abide by these commitments.

Respectfully,

Gretchen Whitmer
Governor