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## AT&T takes heat for opting out of Lifeline broadband program

by Sean Buckley | Dec 2, 2016 12:39pm



AT&T is facing protest from five public interest groups over its recent decision to opt out of the Lifeline broadband program.

The groups urged AT&T to reconsider participating, and offer the modest discount that Lifeline provides to low-income families struggling to afford broadband.

Although the telco will continue to support **the inclusion of broadband within the modernized Lifeline program**, AT&T has officially filed for forbearance from the Lifeline broadband internet access service requirements.

As a result, the groups say AT&T's decision would confine their extension of Lifeline broadband to very limited regions of its service territory.

AT&T said in a blog post issued before the Thanksgiving holiday that while the Lifeline broadband requirements for service providers are now taking effect, the National Eligibility Verifier will not be fully implemented until 2019. What this means is service providers will have to abide by the same administrative and compliance issues as before the reforms were enacted.

“AT&T wireline currently has less than 3% of the voice Lifeline market,” AT&T said in a blog post. “Accepting the forbearance means we still have the option to offer Lifeline discounts on broadband. But it makes little sense to spend resources on implementation of soon-to-be-replaced administrative rules for a new service when we are already offering low-income consumers a better deal through our Access from AT&T program.”

AT&T said that in opting for forbearance, the telco “will not offer a Lifeline discount on our broadband products at this time except where we deploy broadband as part of a high-cost funded public interest commitment.”

**RELATED: [Access from AT&T launches for low-income Americans across 21 states, offers 3 Mbps for \\$5/month](#)**

Jessica J. González, EVP and general counsel at the National Hispanic Media Coalition, said in a release that her organization is fearful that AT&T’s decision could prompt other large telcos to take a similar action.

“Lifeline is an historic initiative that will help connect millions of Americans to the home and mobile broadband that could serve as their pathway out of poverty with access to greater educational and economic opportunities,” Gonzalez said. “AT&T’s decision to opt out of obligations sets a dangerous precedent for other carriers who may also choose to neglect low-income customers.”



As part of the Access from AT&T program, the telco is also offering an in-home Wi-Fi modem through the program and access to its 30,000 public Wi-Fi hotspots nationwide.

News of AT&T’s decision comes on the heels of the FCC’s vote to **modernize** the Lifeline program by allowing low-income Americans to apply their Lifeline discount to broadband service plans that meet certain minimum standards.

The FCC order allowed for existing Lifeline providers to exempt themselves from the broadband obligation.

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