

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WA Telephone Assistance Program
2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET



Reduction Option	FY16	FY17	15-17
FTE	(5.5)	(5.5)	(5.5)
GF-State	(\$2,534,000)	(\$2,534,000)	(\$5,068,000)
Total	(\$2,534,000)	(\$2,534,000)	(\$5,068,000)

REDUCTION OPTION SUMMARY

As required by 2015-17 Biennial Budget Instructions, the Economic Services Administration (ESA) is submitting a reduction option that would eliminate the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP). By implementing this reduction, ESA expects to reduce FTEs by 5.5, end state-funded telephone assistance to approximately 67,000 households, eliminate the contract with the Department of Commerce to support the community voice mail services for approximately 1,500 clients, and eliminate contract payments that support Washington Information Network 2-1-1 (WIN211), which provides health and human services information and referral services.

REDUCTION OPTION DETAIL

Authorized in 1987 by the Legislature, WTAP helps low-income households afford basic telephone services. Access to a telephone is considered a basic necessity – allowing a person to call emergency 911, get medical and social services as well as connect with employers, community, family, and friends. WTAP helps public assistance recipients by discounting basic landline phone service and providing no-cost community voice mail (through a contract with Department of Commerce) to people without phones. Adult recipients of ongoing benefits in certain medical, financial or food assistance benefits are eligible for WTAP. As of June 2014, 67,000 households participate in the program. WTAP also provides \$500,000 annually to WIN211 service - an easy-to-remember phone number to call for health and human service information, referrals, and other assistance.

Since 1985, the federal Lifeline Program (Lifeline) has provided a discount on phone service to qualifying low-income consumers to ensure that all have the opportunities and security that phone service brings, including being able to connect to jobs, family and emergency services. In 2010, Lifeline discounts were expanded to help qualifying low-income consumers with pre-paid wireless service plans. The Lifeline program is available to eligible low-income consumers in every state, territory, commonwealth, and on Tribal lands. To participate in the program, consumers must have an income that is at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guideline (FPL) or participate in qualifying state, federal or Tribal assistance programs ([47 CFR §54.409](#)).

All WTAP participants qualify for the federally funded Lifeline Program either as recipients of the qualifying programs or because their income level is below 135 percent of the FPL.



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This proposal will end the WTAP program. ESA will also eliminate six staff positions, the community voice mail program, as well as funding to WIN211 and data-share agreements with 26 telephone service providers.

The elimination will impact over 67,000 households currently participating in the WTAP program and 1,503 individuals with community voice mail. These households should be able to transition over to the federal Lifeline Program.

To implement the proposed elimination of WTAP, RCW 80.04.130(6) will need to be amended. RCW 80.36.005, [RCW 80.36.410-470](#) will - need to be repealed. - [WACs 388-273-0010](#) through 388-273-0035, WAC 388-436-0002(4)(c)(iv), WAC 388-473-0050 and WAC 388-478-0050 will need to be either amended or repealed.

The full cost of the WTAP program is \$4,729,000 per fiscal year. ESA will take \$2,195,000 per year of the WTAP elimination savings as part of its portion of back-of-the-budget reductions required in the 2014 Supplemental Budget and carried forward into the 2015-17 Biennium. This reduction option represents the remainder of the savings from eliminating the program.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT

WTAP participants, landline telephone companies, WIN211 and other advocate groups will oppose this proposal. Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC), Health Care Authority (HCA), DSHS - Aging and Long Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and the Department of Commerce are other state agencies impacted by this proposal.



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