

# Community Service Voice Mail

This Act authorizes a Community Service Voice Mailbox Program that enables qualified low-income people to get an individually assigned telephone number and the ability to record a personal greeting and a secure private security code to retrieve messages. The community service voice mail service may include toll-free lines in community action agencies through which recipients can access their community service voice mailboxes at no charge. The Community Service Voice Mail Program is funded by a telephone assistance excise tax on all switched access lines and by funds from any federal government or other programs for the purpose.

Submitted as:

Washington

[Chapter 134, Laws of 2003](#)

Status: Enacted into law in 2003.

## Suggested State Legislation

(Title, enacting clause, etc.)

1           Section 1. [*Short Title.*] This Act may be cited as the "Community Service Voice Mail  
2 Program Act."  
3

4           Section 2. [*Definitions.*] As used in this Act:

5           (1) "Community agency" means local community agencies that administer community  
6 service voice mail programs.

7           (2) "Community service voice mail" means a computerized voice mail system that  
8 provides low-income recipients with:

9                   (a) An individually assigned telephone number;

10                   (b) The ability to record a personal greeting; and

11                   (c) A private security code to retrieve messages.

12           (3) "Department" means the [department of social and health services].

13           (4) "Service year" means the period between [July 1st and June 30th].

14           (5) "Community action agency" means local community action agencies or local  
15 community service agencies designated by the [department of community, trade, and economic  
16 development] under [insert citation].  
17

18           Section 3. [*Universal Telephone Service.*] The [legislature] finds that universal telephone  
19 service is an important policy goal of the state. The [legislature] further finds that:

20           (1)   (a) Recent changes in the telecommunications industry, such as federal access  
21 charges, raise concerns about the ability of low-income people to continue to afford access to  
22 local exchange telephone service; and

23                   (b) Many low-income people making the transition to independence from  
24 receiving supportive services through community agencies do not qualify for economic  
25 assistance from the [department].

26           (2)   Therefore, the [legislature] finds that:

27                   (a) It is in the public interest to take steps to mitigate the effects of these changes  
28 on low-income people; and

29 (b) Advances in telecommunications technologies, such as community service  
 30 voice mail provide new and economically efficient ways to secure many of the benefits of  
 31 universal service to low-income people who are not customers of local exchange telephone  
 32 service.

33  
 34 Section 4. [*Components of the Community Service Voice Mail Program.*] The  
 35 Community Service Voice Mail Program shall be available to participants of [department]  
 36 programs set forth in [insert citation]. Assistance shall consist of the following components:

37 (1) A discount on service connection fees of fifty percent or more as set forth in [insert  
 38 citation].

39 (2) A waiver of deposit requirements on local exchange service, as set forth in [insert  
 40 citation].

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

43 (a) The [commission] shall establish a single telephone assistance rate for all local  
 44 exchange companies operating in this state. The telephone assistance rate shall include any  
 45 federal end user access charges and any other charges necessary to obtain local exchange service.

46 (b) The [commission] shall, in establishing the telephone assistance rate, consider  
 47 all charges for local exchange service, including federal end user access charges, mileage  
 48 charges, extended area service, and any other charges necessary to obtain local exchange service.

49 (c) The telephone assistance rate shall only be available to eligible customers  
 50 subscribing to the lowest available priced local exchange flat rate service, where the lowest  
 51 priced local exchange flat rate service, including any federal end user access charges and any  
 52 other charges necessary to obtain local exchange service, is greater than the telephone assistance  
 53 rate. Low-income senior citizens sixty years of age and older and other low-income persons  
 54 identified by the [department] as medically needy shall, where single-party service is available,  
 55 be provided with single-party service as the lowest available local exchange flat rate service.

56 (d) The cost of providing the service shall be paid, to the maximum extent  
 57 possible, by a waiver of all or part of the federal end user access charge(s) and, to the extent  
 58 necessary, from the [Telephone Assistance Fund] created by [insert citation].

59 (4) A discount on a community service voice mailbox that provides recipients with

60 (a) An individually assigned telephone number;

61 (b) The ability to record a personal greeting; and

62 (c) A secure private security code to retrieve messages.

63  
 64 Section 5. [*Funding the Community Service Voice Mail Program.*]

65 (1) The Community Service Voice Mail Program shall be funded by a telephone  
 66 assistance excise tax on all switched access lines and by funds from any federal government or  
 67 other programs for this purpose. Switched access lines are defined in [insert citation]. The  
 68 telephone assistance excise tax shall be applied equally to all residential and business access  
 69 lines not to exceed fourteen cents per month. The telephone assistance excise tax shall be  
 70 separately identified on each ratepayer's bill as the "Community Service Voice Mail Program."  
 71 All money collected from the telephone assistance excise tax shall be transferred to a [Telephone  
 72 Assistance Fund] administered by the [department].

73 (2) Local exchange companies shall bill the Fund for their expenses incurred in offering  
 74 the Community Service Voice Mail Program, including administrative and program expenses.  
 75 The [department] shall disburse the money to the local exchange companies. The [department] is  
 76 exempted from having to conclude a contract with local exchange companies in order to effect  
 77 this reimbursement. The [department] shall recover its administrative costs from the [Fund]. The

78 [department] may specify by rule the range and extent of administrative and program expenses  
79 that will be reimbursed to local exchange companies.

80 (3) The [department] shall enter into an agreement with the [department of community,  
81 trade, and economic development] for an amount not to exceed eight percent of the prior fiscal  
82 year's total revenue for the administrative and program expenses of providing community service  
83 voice mail services. The Community Service Voice Mail Service Program may include toll-free  
84 lines in community action agencies through which recipients can access their community service  
85 voice mailboxes at no charge.

86

87 Section 6. *[Rules.]*

88 (1) The [commission] and the [department] may adopt any rules necessary to implement  
89 [insert citation].

90 (2) Rules necessary for the implementation of community service voice mail services  
91 shall be made by the [commission] and the [department] in consultation with the [department of  
92 community, trade, and economic development].

93

94 Section 7. *[Reimbursement Limits.]* The [state] Telephone Assistance Program shall limit  
95 reimbursement to

96 (1) One residential switched access line per eligible household, or

97 (2) One discounted community service voice mailbox per eligible person.

98

99 Section 8. *[Waivers.]* Local exchange companies shall waive deposits on local exchange  
100 service for eligible subscribers and provide a fifty percent discount on the company's customary  
101 charge for commencing telecommunications service for eligible subscribers. Part or all of the  
102 remaining fifty percent of service connection fees may be paid by funds from federal government  
103 or other programs for this purpose. The [commission] or other appropriate agency shall make  
104 timely application for any available federal funds. The remaining portion of the connection fee to  
105 be paid by the subscriber shall be expressly payable by installment fees spread over a period of  
106 months. A subscriber may, however, choose to pay the connection fee in a lump sum. Costs  
107 associated with the waiver and discount shall be accounted for separately and recovered from the  
108 telephone assistance fund.

109

110 Section 9. *[Eligibility Requirements.]*

111 (1) Adult recipients of [department]-administered programs for the financially needy  
112 which provide continuing financial or medical assistance, food stamps, or supportive services to  
113 persons in their own homes are eligible for participation in the Telephone Assistance Program.  
114 The [department] shall notify the participants of their eligibility.

115 (2) Participants in Community Service Voice Mail Programs are eligible for participation  
116 in services available under [insert citation] after completing use of community service voice mail  
117 services. Eligibility shall be for a period including the remainder of the current service year and  
118 the following service year. Community agencies shall notify the [department] of participants  
119 eligible under this subsection.

120

121 Section 10. *[Reports.]* The [department] shall report to the appropriate committees of the  
122 [legislature] by [December 1] of each year on the status of the state telephone assistance  
123 program. The report shall include the number of participants by qualifying social service  
124 programs receiving benefits from the telephone assistance program and the type of benefits  
125 participants receive. The report shall also include a description of the geographical distribution of

126 participants, the program's annual revenue and expenditures, and any recommendations for  
127 legislative action.

128

129 Section 11. [*Severability.*] [Insert severability clause.]

130

131 Section 12. [*Repealer.*] [Insert repealer clause.]

132

133 Section 13. [*Effective Date.*] [Insert effective date.]