



Advocates say phone service discounts are available

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SPRINGFIELD — Consumer advocates are trying to draw attention to programs that could help more low-income Illinoisans afford phone service.

Illinois Commerce Commission member John Colgan said Monday as many as 10 percent of Illinoisans have no phone service.

One federal program, Lifeline, provides a monthly phone service discount of up to \$10. Another program, Link-Up, can help pay for up to \$42 in startup costs if the state and federal programs are combined.

People who already use assistance programs such as Medicaid and food stamps could qualify.

Colgan said it's important to get the word out about the programs, which can be used for most landline and cellular phones.

"There are people who have lost jobs who are not accustomed to navigating the waters of public assistance," Colgan said. "And this would be a program that probably quite a few of them could take advantage of."

Now, 266,000 Illinoisans are taking part in the Lifeline monthly reimbursement.

Consumer advocates such as the Citizens Utility Board are trying to promote the programs this week. CUB senior policy analyst Bryan McDaniel says the programs to help people get phones are important. But so is examining your phone plan and lowering your bill as much as possible.

"This \$10 credit will help, but if your bill is \$60 or \$70 a month instead of \$30, it's not going to go as far as it should," said CUB senior policy analyst Bryan McDaniel.

For more information, about the programs, visit www.icc.illinois.gov/lifeline or call your phone company.