

Regarding Petition of the Washington Department of Social and Health Services
to increase the Co-Payment of Washington Telephone Assistance Program
Participants

Docket: WUTC Docket UT-031033

Date: 7 July, 2003

Comments of Community Voice Mail, national office and WA State member
agencies

To WUTC Chairwoman Showalter, Commissioner Hemstad, and Commissioner Oshie:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the rulemaking process
re: a proposed increase in the client co-payment for telephone service.

As directors of Community Voice Mail services currently operating in
Washington State, our mission is to distribute personalized voicemail numbers
to people in crisis and in transition. For twelve years these personalized
voicemail services have linked homeless and phoneless Washingtonians to
employment, housing, medical services, and safety, serving more than 4,000
people in 2002 alone.

As you know, recent legislation made our services among those supported by
WTAP revenue, placing voicemail on the continuum of telecommunications
services available to low-income people. Over the years we have worked with
DSHS to educate low-income people about WTAP, to streamline the process
clients undergo when moving from CVM to WTAP (or vice versa), and to improve
the quality of both services. We therefore respectfully submit these comments
in an effort to articulate what we believe is a need to balance two critical
needs: the long-term viability of the WTAP fund and the impact of the
proposed increase on WTAP customers.

Our concern is that the increase in monthly co-payment from \$4.00 to \$9.00
will have serious impact on WTAP customers and places a disproportionate
amount of the burden of recouping a fund surplus on these low-income people.

We urge the WUTC to closely review alternative options available for
increasing WTAP revenue (and therefore, its viability), including the option
to increase the excise tax from \$.13 to \$.14 on all subscriber lines with no
or a nominal co-payment increase by WTAP customers.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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In 2002, more than 23,000 people in crisis used Community Voice Mail to reconnect to opportunity and support.