

The seal of the Office of Regulatory Staff, South Carolina, is a circular emblem. It features a central figure of a palmetto tree, a symbol of South Carolina. The tree is set against a background of a blue sky with white clouds. The words "OFFICE OF REGULATORY STAFF" are written in a circular path around the top of the seal, and "SOUTH CAROLINA" is written around the bottom. In the center, the letters "ORS" are prominently displayed in a large, serif font.

Status Report on the South Carolina  
Universal Service Fund  
Lifeline and Link-up Programs

Prepared by the Office of Regulatory Staff

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## Introduction and Background

Since 2005, the Office of Regulatory Staff has administered South Carolina's Lifeline and Link-Up programs with two primary objectives in mind: to increase consumer knowledge of the programs and to assist eligible consumers in the process of attaining Lifeline and Link-up assistance. Each objective was designed to advance the common goal of true universal service and to provide an economic benefit for South Carolina. The following report demonstrates how the ORS' approach to Lifeline outreach has contributed to increased enrollment over the past eight years.

When the ORS began administering the Lifeline and Link-up programs, only 10% of the consumers eligible for the assistance were actually receiving Lifeline benefits. Under the regulations in effect at that time, approximately 271,500 households met the criteria for receiving Lifeline assistance. By September 2012, more than 411,316 households had become eligible for Lifeline<sup>1</sup> based on their participation in nutritional assistance programs alone. Recent reforms in the Lifeline program at the federal level included four new programs and an income-level eligibility feature as well<sup>2</sup>. To meet the needs of such an overwhelming number of potential participants, the ORS has built partnerships with agencies and organizations that already have a method of reaching the Lifeline demographic. Examples of these partners include DSS, DHHS, the Benefit Bank, Harvest Hope, Low Country Food Bank, and Golden Harvest. By cultivating relationships with partners whose organizations are designed to reach low-income families where they are, the ORS has been able to blanket South Carolina efficiently and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dss.sc.gov/content/library/statistics/fa/fs-1209.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In addition to SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), Medicaid and TANF, eligibility criteria expanded to include participation in LIHEAP, Section 8, Free lunch program, and SSI. Additionally, a household with no members participating in any of the programs but whose total gross income falls below 135% of the federal poverty level may also qualify.

cost effectively. In the past two years, the ORS Lifeline staff has contacted and visited social service agents in all 46 counties. Furthermore, during 2011 and 2012, the ORS saturated the Midlands, the Low Country, and the I-95 corridor with television commercials explaining the program and encouraging eligible consumers to seek more information.

Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) have also stepped up their outreach by running advertisements on television and on their websites. For the past four years, South Carolina's ETCs have participated in publicizing Lifeline Awareness Week each September in a variety of ways including bill inserts, print media, and radio advertising. Wireless ETCs have joined forces both with government agencies on the federal level to contact consumers directly and with major retailers, such as grocery and convenience stores, to meet consumers where they shop. Due to initiatives undertaken by both the ORS and ETCs, thousands of applications have been distributed in every county, and Lifeline enrollment has reached an all-time high.

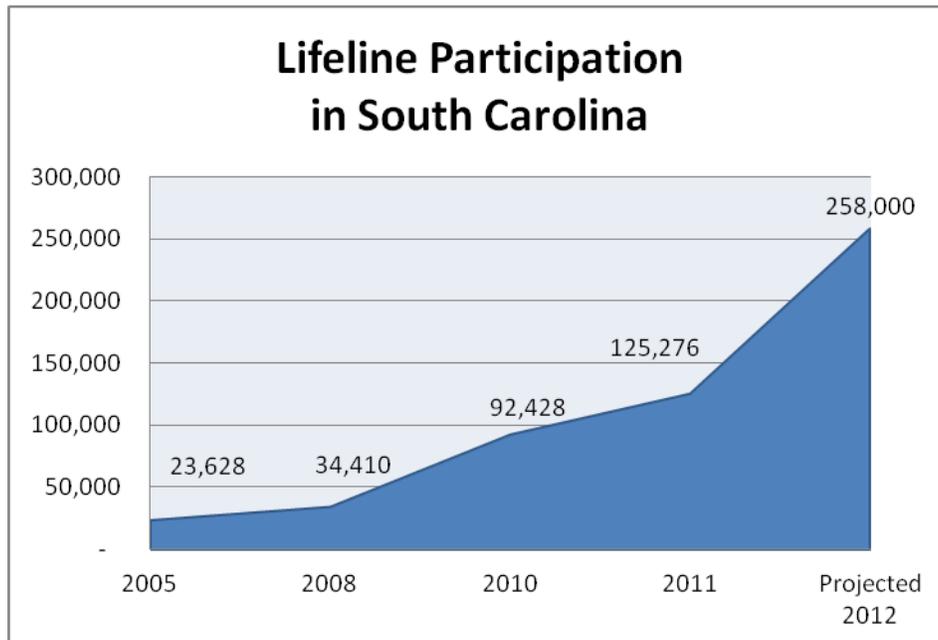
### **Program Participation and Results**

South Carolina's participation in the Lifeline program has increased steadily since 2005 and has experienced a remarkable leap in 2011 and 2012. As of December 2005, fewer than 25,000 households were enrolled in Lifeline. Aggressive outreach by the ORS and the addition of several new competitive ETCs saw the number of enrollees soar to 92,428 by the end of 2010<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Total reported on the Annual Reports filed with ORS April 1, 2011.

In 2011, two wireless ETCs, Safelink Wireless and Assurance Wireless, began offering Lifeline in South Carolina. Based on USAC disbursement data<sup>4</sup>, the ORS estimates that Lifeline enrollment will exceed 258,000 households by the end of 2012, more than doubling the number of households served in just one year. The following chart illustrates how Lifeline enrollment in South Carolina has increased over the past eight years.



### The Future of Lifeline

The ORS is pleased with the continued progress of the Lifeline program since 2005. Through aggressive advertising, ETCs in South Carolina have extended the reach of the Lifeline program. Consequently, the ORS is able to redirect its energy both toward educating partners and eligible consumers about the variety of offerings available and toward preparing the State Universal Service Fund to meet the demands of the future. In light of the regulatory and market changes taking place in the industry, the ORS is

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.usac.org/li/tools/disbursements/results.aspx>

confident that ETCs will keep enrollment numbers strong and growing. In the meantime, the ORS will continue to oversee the program's administration, maintain the program's integrity, and ensure the program's stability in the future. Although the Lifeline program is adjusting to significant alterations at the federal level, the ORS remains committed to the goal of universal service and to providing an economic benefit for South Carolina while addressing the needs of low-income consumers.