

Senate Bill 1208 – Low-income utility customer assistance programs: concurrent application process

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Agenda

- Summary of SB 1208
- Principles for implementation of Section 3
- Upcoming activities
- Lifeline program background

Summary of SB 1208: Section 1

Legislative intent

- Improve all low-income utility customer assistance program application processes and maximize upfront data sharing in order to:
 - Reduce outreach and enrollment expenditures
 - Increase participation
- Maximize the use of technologies to facilitate the outreach and enrollment processes for low-income utility programs
- Coordinate enrollment process for those programs between agencies and public and private utilities
- Concurrent application process should complement, rather than replace, existing application processes

Summary of SB 1208: Section 2 (PUC § 731)

Concurrent application process for ESA, CARE, and FERA

- On or before June 30, 2024, the commission shall develop a "concurrent application process" that enables customers to concurrently apply, or begin to apply, to ESA, CARE, and FERA programs using data collected during the original application process
 - In coordination and consultation with the Department of Community Services and Development and other relevant state agencies
 - Notify, to the extent possible, eligible individuals that they have been successfully enrolled or are in the process of being enrolled into other programs
 - Complement, rather than replace, existing application processes
 - Utilities shall receive consent from its applicants before sharing data (i.e. using already-obtained application information to begin the enrollment process for other low-income programs)

Summary of SB 1208: Section 3 (PUC § 910.8)

LIOB report

- On or before June 30, 2023, the LIOB shall submit a report to the Legislature regarding:
 - The opportunity and process for expanding the third-party administrator contract used for the Universal Lifeline Telephone Service (ULTS) program, or establishing a similar new contract, to include water, gas, and electric utility programs to:
 - Facilitate enrollment between low-income assistance programs
 - Minimize privacy and data sharing concerns
 - Expedite eligibility verification processes
 - A recommendation for funding the expansion of the contract or establishment of a new contract

Principles for implementation – LIOB Report

- Resource constraints – LIOB and CPUC
- Limited time (June 30, 2023 report to legislature)
- LIOB Report (Section 3) is independent from implementation of concurrent application process for ESA, CARE, and FERA (Section 2) and has overlapping timelines

Upcoming activities

- **Jan 2023:** LIOB subcommittee planning and work plan development
- **Jan – May 2023:** Sub-committee meets and reaches consensus on recommendations
- **April – June 2023:** Draft report
- **June 30, 2023:** Report sent to legislature

Note, in parallel, ED will have several activities related to implementation of Section 2 of the bill (develop concurrent application process)

Primer on Energy and Communication bill discount programs

CARE / FERA programs

- $\leq 200\%$ / $> 200-250\%$ of FPL
- Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs) implement programs
- Funded through a public purpose charge to energy utility ratepayers
- Self-certification enrollment process
- LIOB est. in Statute in 2001 and oversees programs
- Customers geographically tied to their energy utility. Discount is fixed

LifeLine program

- $\leq 150\%$ of FPL / $\leq 135\%$ for federal benefits
- CPUC staff implements using a third party administrator
- Funded through Federal dollars and a surcharge on voice service from CA customers
- Eligibility verification upfront
- Universal Lifeline Telephone Service Trust Administrative Committee est. in Statute in 2001 and oversees program
- Customers may bundle telephone service with broadband. LifeLine benefit varies

LifeLine Program

- California LifeLine provides up to \$17.90 as a “reimbursing” subsidy to service providers for threshold services to qualifying Californians.
- Service providers must provide unlimited voice, text and 6 GB of data as a threshold to receive the full subsidy.
- California LifeLine customers sign up with a service provider who assists them in the application process. The service providers independently advertise and solicit customers for enrollment.
- There are currently 13 wireless resellers and 27 wireline providers.
- 1.2 million current Californian active customers.
- 85% are through wireless services.

Appendix

SB 1208 Full Text



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SB 1208: Section 1

(a) It is the intent of the Legislature that this act do all of the following:

(1) Improve all low-income utility customer assistance program application processes and maximize upfront data sharing in order to reduce outreach and enrollment expenditures and increase participation by eligible individuals and families.

(2) Maximize the use of existing and future technologies in order to facilitate the outreach and enrollment processes for low-income utility customer assistance programs.

(3) Coordinate the enrollment process for those programs between agencies and public and private utilities.

(b) It is further the intent of the Legislature that the concurrent application process complement, rather than replace, existing application processes for each of those programs.

SB 1208: Section 2

(a) (1) On or before June 30, 2024, the commission, in coordination and consultation with the Department of Community Services and Development and other relevant state agencies that provide low-income electric or gas utility customer assistance programs, shall develop a process that, to the extent possible, enables customers to concurrently apply, or begin to apply, to multiple low-income customer assistance programs using data collected during the original application process, including, but not limited to, all of the following programs:

(A) The California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) program described in Section 739.1.

(B) The Family Electric Rate Assistance program described in Section 739.12.

(C) The Energy Savings Assistance program described in Section 2790.

(2) The process developed pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be known as the concurrent application process.

(b) The commission shall work with state agencies, electrical corporations, and gas corporations to notify, to the extent possible, eligible individuals that they have been successfully enrolled or are in the process of being enrolled into other programs.

(c) The concurrent application process shall complement, rather than replace, other application processes.

(d) Before sharing data, an electrical corporation or gas corporation shall receive consent from its low-income applicants to use already-obtained application information to begin the enrollment process for other low-income electric or gas utility customer assistance programs.

SB 1208: Section 3

(a) On or before June 30, 2023, the Low-Income Oversight Board established pursuant to Section 382.1 shall submit a report to the Legislature regarding the opportunity and process for expanding the third-party administrator contract used for the Universal Lifeline Telephone Service (ULTS) program, or establishing a similar new contract, to include water, gas, and electric utility service for purposes of facilitating enrollment between low-income assistance programs, minimizing privacy and data sharing concerns, and expediting eligibility verification processes. The report shall include a recommendation for funding the expansion of the contract or establishment of a new contract.

(b) Pursuant to Section 10231.5 of the Government Code, this section is repealed on January 1, 2027.