

2016 -- S 2051

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LC003740
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2016

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- PUBLIC UTILITIES
COMMISSION--INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY SERVICE FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

Introduced By: Senators Coyne, Miller, Conley, Walaska, and Goldin

Date Introduced: January 13, 2016

Referred To: Senate Health & Human Services

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 39-1-42 of the General Laws in Chapter 39-1 entitled "Public
2 Utilities Commission" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **39-1-42. Access to telephone information services for persons with disabilities.** -- (a)

4 The public utilities commission shall establish, administer and promote an information
5 accessibility service that includes:

6 (1) A statewide telephone relay service and, through the competitive bidding process,
7 contract for the administration and operation of such a relay system for utilization of the
8 telecommunications network by deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired persons;

9 (2) The adaptive telephone equipment loan program capable of servicing the needs of
10 persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, severely speech impaired, or those with neuromuscular
11 impairments for use with a single party telephone line, [or wireless telephone](#), to any subscriber
12 who is certified as deaf, hard of hearing, severely speech impaired, or with neuromuscular
13 impairments by a licensed physician, audiologist, speech pathologist, or a qualified state agency,
14 pursuant to chapter 23 of this title; and

15 (3) A telephone access to the text of newspaper programs to residents who are blind,
16 deaf or blind, visually impaired, or reading impaired with a single party telephone line.

17 (b) The commission shall establish, by rule or regulation, an appropriate funding
18 mechanism to recover the costs of providing this service from each residence and business

1 telephone access line or trunk in the state, including PBX trunks and centrex equivalent trunks
2 and each service line or trunk, and upon each user interface number or extension number or
3 similarly identifiable line, trunk, or path to or from a digital network. Notwithstanding the
4 foregoing, there shall not be any additional funding mechanism used to charge each residence and
5 business telephone access line or truck in the state, including PBX trunks and centrex equivalent
6 trunks and each service line or trunk, or upon each user interface number or extension number or
7 similarly identifiable line, trunk or path to or from a digital network, to recover the costs of
8 providing the services outlined in subsections (a)(1), (2) or (3) above.

9 (c) The commission, with the assistance of the state commission on the deaf and hard of
10 hearing, shall also develop the appropriate rules, regulations and service standards necessary to
11 implement the provisions of subsection (a)(1) of this section. At a minimum, however, the
12 commission shall require, under the terms of the contract, that the relay service provider:

13 (1) Offer its relay services seven (7) days a week, twenty-four (24) hours a day,
14 including holidays;

15 (2) Hire only qualified salaried operators with deaf language skills; and

16 (3) Maintain the confidentiality of all communications.

17 (d) The commission shall collect from the telecommunications service providers the
18 amounts of the surcharge collected from their subscribers and remit to the department of human
19 services an additional ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) annually commencing in fiscal year 2005
20 for the adaptive telephone equipment loan program and forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) to the
21 department of human services for the establishment of a new telephone access to the text of
22 newspaper programs. In addition, eighty thousand dollars (\$80,000) shall annually be remitted to
23 the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for an emergency and public
24 communication access program, pursuant to § 23-1.8-4 of the Rhode Island general laws. The
25 surcharge referenced hereunder shall be generated from existing funding mechanisms and shall
26 not be generated as a result of any new funding mechanisms charged to each residence and
27 business telephone access line or trunk in the state, including PBX trunks and centrex equivalent
28 trunks and each service line or trunk, or upon each user interface number or extension number or
29 similarly identifiable line, trunk or path to or from a digital network.

30 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- PUBLIC UTILITIES
COMMISSION--INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY SERVICE FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

1 This act would include wireless telephones in the adaptive telephone equipment loan
2 program that services the needs of persons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, severely speech
3 impaired, or those with neuromuscular impairments.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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