



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Daniel L. Squadron

Elected Officials Urge Fcc and Verizon to Better Serve Senior Citizens and Provide Multi-Lingual Access

DANIEL L. SQUADRON April 17, 2015

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Hundreds of Seniors Realized Their Discount Benefits Were Stopped Without Notice

Non-English Speakers Struggle to Reapply Due To Language Barrier

NEW YORK – Today, a coalition of city, state and federal elected officials sent a letter to the Chair of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), urging the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau to revise Verizon's Lifeline program to include multi-lingual notices and inform subscribers of recertification and service changes. A letter was also sent to Verizon, requesting a time efficient resolution to these miscommunication issues in order to ensure that the most vulnerable New Yorkers are staying connected through the Lifeline program.

Both letters were led by Council Member Margaret Chin, State Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblywoman Nily Rozic. The coalition includes Congressmembers Nydia Velazquez and Jerrold Nadler, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, State Senator Toby Stavisky, Assemblymembers Sheldon Silver, Edward Braunstein, and Peter Abbate, and Council Members Carlos Menchaca, Daniel Dromm, Paul Vallone, Jimmy Van Bramer, Rosie Mendez, Peter Koo, Mark Weprin, Rory Lancman and Mark Treyger.

Overseen by the FCC, the Verizon Lifeline program provides seniors—many of whom struggle financially due to fixed incomes—with vital discounts to their landline phone service. In 2014, Verizon opted to work with Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), a third party provider, on the recertification process. Shortly thereafter, hundreds of longtime recipients of the Lifeline program found their benefits discontinued without prior notice.

The aforementioned elected officials have raised concerns over USAC's confusing recertification process, in which forms are only offered in English. This creates obvious and significant hardship for non-English speakers, and leaves a significant number of seniors without the ability to access these important discount benefits.

When asked about the possibility of providing multi-lingual service for recertification, representatives from USAC indicated that a directive must come from the FCC and the Bureau, which prompted today's letter from the electeds.

"Thirty-seven percent of New York City's population is foreign born and over 48 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home," the elected officials wrote. "Yet, the recertification form is only available in English. ... This is why we request that the FCC and the Bureau work with USAC to revise the recertification process."