

**CUYAHOGA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
SENIOR AND ADULT SERVICES**

**TESTIMONY FOR
THE SENATE ENERGY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES
December 9, 2009**

Good Morning Chairman Widener and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. My name is Lynn Wieland and I am here today on behalf of the Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on Senate Bill 162.

The Department of Senior and Adult Services provides services for some of the most vulnerable elderly and at-risk adults in Cuyahoga County. We provide home health care, Adult Protective Services, information, outreach, assistance with applying for benefits for the frail elderly residing in the community in addition to qualifying individuals for Medicaid. We serve the most financially at risk elderly persons in Cuyahoga County.

We have serious concerns about some of the provisions in Senate Bill 162 and the impact the legislation will have on the people we serve. The Lifeline Program is just that for elderly and disabled people. It is their lifeline in a medical emergency and essential for making medical appointments, home visits by nurses and all social

services providers. For the homebound elderly and disabled the telephone is sometimes their only link to the outside world. Lifeline was designed in recognition of the significance role that the telephone plays in the lives of our frailest and most vulnerable citizens to provide basic service at an affordable price. Basic telephone service in our area with AT&T is about \$20.00. The Lifeline program would bring the price down to around \$8.00 a much more affordable price for a low-income senior living on a Social Security income of under \$700 each month. SB 162 would allow the phone service providers to impose yearly increases of 20-40 percent to all customers - including people on the Lifeline program. These steep increases would soon make this program unaffordable for many low-income people. No longer affordable for elderly and disable people we serve.

This legislation also seeks to absolve the telephone company from any responsibility to inform customers of the Lifeline program. I remember when the Lifeline program began. There was no marketing of the program no one knew about the program and few signed up for the service. Some people have suggested the internet as a way of keeping in touch and informed. However, most of the elderly we serve do not have computers, cannot afford the internet and are not able to make it to the library or the senior center. This program needs to be marketed.

Last I would like to ask, why are we moving backwards in this financially difficult time? When so many people are struggling why would we pass legislation that would cut in half the time they have to pay their telephone bill – another provision

of SB 162? Why would we increase deposits for telephone service from 230% of one month's bill to 300%? Because the Lifeline program is a lifeline for older and disabled persons it is unconscionable that this bill would allow the telephone company three days to restore out-of-service telephone lines instead of the current twenty-four hours. If a customer briefly loses telephone service due to nonpayment and pays the bill in full, this legislation would allow five days instead of the current twenty-four hours to restore service.

Chairman Widener I would ask that you and the committee members take a moment to look at these provisions and remember your constituents that are living at or near poverty level along with the unemployed people for whom the telephone is a vital tool in their job search. I can not think of a worse time to implement these types of provisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.