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SWEENEY-SMITH INTRODUCE RESOLUTION TO CREATE ANNUAL LIFELINE AWARENESS WEEK IN SEPTEMBER

TRENTON – In order to bring consumer awareness to government funded programs that can help residents obtain basic and affordable phone services, Senate President Steve Sweeney and Senator Bob Smith introduced a resolution today that would designate one week each year as “Lifeline Awareness Week.”

“For many low-income families, paying for telephone service along with groceries, utility bills, and other household needs can be extremely difficult,” said Senator Sweeney (D-Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem). “This can lead to some going without access to basic landline service. We must ensure that residents in New Jersey have access to telephone services at home and on the go. Through Lifeline Awareness week, we can encourage residents to get connected by signing up to federal and state-funded alternative phone service options that are reliable and cost-effective.”

“It is important to make sure that low-income residents and others who are in need of financial assistance get affordable telephone services,” said Senator Smith (D-Middlesex/Somerset). “The Lifeline Assistance program can help us get there by bringing awareness of discounted programs to our communities. This will help people stay connected with families and ensure they have access to resources and much needed emergency services.”

The resolution, to designate a week in September as “Lifeline Awareness Week,” is part of a nationwide initiative by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUC), and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to provide more affordable telephone service programs for qualified customers. In 2009, NARUC’s Board of Directors passed a resolution to encourage eligible consumers to participate in the Lifeline Assistance federal/state funded program. The program provides benefits such as discounts on monthly landline and pre-paid wireless phone bill charges for low-income individuals, senior citizens, and adults with disabilities.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, the Lifeline Assistance program was established in 1985 throughout the country to ensure that all Americans have access to phone services. Eligible consumers must have an income that is at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines or participating in assistance programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that the 2015 federal poverty guidelines for an individual is \$11,770 and a family of four is \$24,250. Resident can sign-up through their telephone service provider.

For information on the program visit the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities website at <http://www.state.nj.us/bpu/index.shtml> and click the Assistance Programs page under Customer Assistance. To learn more on how to participate visit <http://www.lifelinesupport.org/ls/> or call the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-225-5322.