

CHAPTER 234—S.F.No. 740

An act relating to utilities; requiring a review of the state telephone assistance program; establishing pilot programs for voice messaging assistance.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM; REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The commissioner of human services, in consultation with the public utilities commission and the commissioner of public service, shall convene a working group to review the state telephone assistance program, Minnesota Statutes, sections 237.69 to 237.711. The working group shall develop and submit recommendations to the legislature by January 15, 1998, which conform the state program to the federal report and order on universal service issued May 8, 1997, by the federal communications commission, and which provide the best package of assistance to needy telecommunications consumers. Members of the working group shall include representatives of the office of the attorney general, telecommunications providers, and consumer organizations representing the interests of seniors, children, the disabled, and low-income utility consumers. The public utilities commission and the commissioner of public service shall take all steps necessary to preserve the eligibility of current telephone assistance program participants.

Sec. 2. COMMUNITY VOICE MESSAGING; PILOT PROGRAMS.

(a) The commissioner of the department of human services shall develop and implement, by July 1, 1997, two pilot programs to provide voice messaging services for individuals who do not have a telephone and who meet the income criteria in Minnesota Statutes 1996, section 237.70, subdivision 4a. One pilot program should be in the metropolitan area and one in greater Minnesota. The commissioner shall contract with a nonprofit, community-based voice messaging provider for the provision of these services, and shall report to the legislature by December 31, 1998, regarding the demand for these services, the impact of the availability of voice messaging on the individuals receiving voice messaging services, and legislative recommendations regarding the continued provision of such services.

(b) The public utilities commission shall provide up to \$2 per month per active voice messaging account from the telephone assistance fund established in Minnesota Statutes 1996, section 237.701, up to a total of \$50,000 for these pilot programs, and shall consider this additional use of the fund in establishing the uniform statewide surcharge for the telephone assistance plan.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

Sections 1 and 2 are effective the day following final enactment.

Presented to the governor May 29, 1997

Signed by the governor June 2, 1997, 2:20 p.m.

New language is indicated by underline, deletions by ~~strikeout~~.