



Public Testimony
Senate Commerce Committee
Re: Senior Poverty Issues (Lifeline Telephone Program)
Senate Bill 728
April 25, 2017

Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

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The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty is a coalition of diverse religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty. We are submitting written testimony today in **support of Senate Bill 728**, expanding access to the lifeline telephone service.

About 1 in 10 Rhode Island seniors are living on incomes below the federal poverty level. Another large group live on the edge of poverty and experience challenging financial circumstances that are significantly exacerbated due to the cost of care. Individuals participating in the Division of Elderly Affairs co-pay program have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level *and* face significant costs for care.

Assistance with costs for essential services, like telephone services, can be an important way to help these low-income seniors stretch their very limited dollars.

As a society, we have a moral responsibility to attend to the needs of elders who are struggling to make ends meet. All Rhode Island seniors should be free to age with dignity and financial security, knowing that their basic needs will be met.

We support Senate Bill 728 which would expand eligibility for the lifeline telephone program to also include those who are utilizing the Division of Elderly Affairs co-pay program.