

§ 62-157. Telecommunications relay service.

(a) Finding. – The General Assembly finds and declares that it is in the public interest to provide access to public telecommunications services for hearing impaired or speech impaired persons, including those who also have vision impairment, and that a statewide telecommunications relay service for telephone service should be established.

(a1) Definitions. – For purposes of this section:

- (1) "CMRS" is as defined in G.S. 143B-1400.
- (2) "CMRS connection" is as defined in G.S. 143B-1400.
- (3) "CMRS provider" is as defined in G.S. 143B-1400.
- (4) "Exchange access facility" means a connection from a particular telephone subscriber's premises to the telephone system of a service provider, and includes company-provided local access lines, private branch exchange trunks, and centrex network access registers.
- (5) "Local service provider" means a local exchange company, competing local provider, or telephone membership corporation.

(b) Authority to Require Surcharge. – The Commission shall require local service providers to impose a monthly surcharge on all residential and business local exchange access facilities to fund a statewide telecommunications relay service by which hearing impaired or speech impaired persons, including those who also have vision impairment, may communicate with others by telephone. This surcharge, however, may not be imposed on participants in the Subscriber Line Charge Waiver Program or the Link-up Carolina Program established by the Commission. This surcharge, and long distance revenues collected under subsection (f) of this section, are not includable in gross receipts subject to the franchise tax levied under G.S. 105-120 or the sales tax levied under G.S. 105-164.4.

(c) Specification of Surcharge. – The Department of Health and Human Services shall initiate a telecommunications relay service by filing a petition with the Commission requesting the service and detailing initial projected required funding. The Commission shall, after giving notice and an opportunity to be heard to other interested parties, set the initial monthly surcharge based upon the amount of funding necessary to implement and operate the service, including a reasonable margin for a reserve. The surcharge shall be identified on customer bills as a special surcharge for provision of a telecommunications relay service for hearing impaired and speech impaired persons. The Commission may, upon petition of any interested party, and after giving notice and an opportunity to be heard to other interested parties, revise the surcharge from time to time if the funding requirements change. In no event shall the surcharge exceed twenty-five cents (25¢) per month for each exchange access facility.

(d) Funds to Be Deposited in Special Account. – The local service providers shall collect the surcharge from their customers and deposit the moneys collected with the State Treasurer, who shall maintain the funds in an interest-bearing, nonreverting account. After consulting with the State Treasurer, the Commission shall direct how and when the local service providers shall deposit these moneys. Revenues from this fund shall be available only to the Department of Health and Human Services to administer the statewide telecommunications relay service program, including its establishment, operation, and promotion. The Commission may allow the Department of Health and Human Services to use, over a rolling 12-month period, up to four cents (4¢) per exchange access facility of the surcharge for the purpose of providing telecommunications devices for hearing impaired or speech impaired persons, including those who also have vision impairment, through a distribution program. The Commission shall prepare such guidelines for the distribution program as it deems appropriate and in the public interest. Both the Commission and the Public Staff may audit all aspects of the telecommunications relay service program, including the distribution programs, as they do with any public utility subject to the provisions of this

Chapter. Equipment paid for with surcharge revenues, as allowed by the Commission, may be distributed only by the Department of Health and Human Services.

(d1) The Department of Health and Human Services shall utilize revenues from the wireless surcharge collected under subsection (i) of this section to support the Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, in accordance with G.S. 143B-216.33, G.S. 143B-216.34, and Chapter 8B of the General Statutes.

(e) Administration of Service. – The Department of Health and Human Services shall administer the statewide telecommunications relay service program, including its establishment, operation, and promotion. The Department may contract out the provision of this service for four-year periods to one or more service providers, using the provisions of G.S. 143-129. The Department shall administer all programs and services, including the Regional Resource Centers within the Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing in accordance with G.S. 143B-216.33, G.S. 143B-216.34, and Chapter 8B of the General Statutes.

(f) Charge to Users. – The users of the telecommunications relay service shall be charged their approved long distance and local rates for telephone services (including the surcharge required by this section), but no additional charges may be imposed for the use of the relay service. The local service providers shall collect revenues from the users of the relay service for long distance services provided through the relay service. These revenues shall be deposited in the special fund established in subsection (d) of this section in a manner determined by the Commission after consulting with the State Treasurer. Local service providers shall be compensated for collection, inquiry, and other administrative services provided by said companies, subject to the approval of the Commission.

(g) Reporting Requirement. – The Commission shall, after consulting with the Department of Health and Human Services, develop a format and filing schedule for a comprehensive financial and operational report on the telecommunications relay service program. The Department of Health and Human Services shall thereafter prepare and file these reports as required by the Commission with the Commission and the Public Staff. The Department shall also be required to report to the Revenue Laws Study Committee.

(h) Power to Regulate. – The Commission shall have the same power to regulate the operation of the telecommunications relay service program as it has to regulate any public utility subject to the provisions of this Chapter.

(i) Wireless Surcharge. – A CMRS provider, as part of its monthly billing process, must collect the same surcharge imposed on each exchange access facility under this section for each CMRS connection. A CMRS provider may deduct a one percent (1%) administrative fee from the total amount of surcharge collected. A CMRS provider shall remit the surcharge collected, less the administrative fee, to the 911 Board in the same manner and with the same frequency as the local service providers remit the surcharge to the State Treasurer. The 911 Board shall remit the funds collected from the surcharge to the special account created under subsection (d) of this section. (1989, c. 599; 1997-443, s. 11A.118(a); 1999-402, s. 1; 2003-341, s. 1; 2007-383, s. 4; 2009-451, s. 10.56(c), (d); 2012-142, s. 10.24(a), (b); 2015-241, s. 7A.3; 2016-94, s. 12J.2.)