BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2260

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Senior & Low-Income Internet/Phone Discounts in Ohio

The real programs still available in 2026 — how to tell if you qualify and how to apply

Plain-English tech help from:
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Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Start with honesty: the Affordable Connectivity Program ended in 2024 and is gone, so ignore anyone advertising it as current. What's real in 2026: the federal Lifeline program still gives a monthly discount (commonly around nine dollars) on phone or internet to households that qualify — apply free at lifelinesupport.org, and if you're on Medicaid, SNAP, or SSI you likely qualify.

Internet companies also run their own low-cost plans, so ask your provider directly. Ohio residents 60+ can get a free Golden Buckeye Card for other discounts, and your public library offers free Wi-Fi, computers, and often hotspots to borrow. Never pay a fee to enroll in any of these, and verify every offer through official channels.

1 The Short Version

There are genuine ways to lower what you pay for internet and phone, but it helps to start with honesty: the big federal program many people heard about — the Affordable Connectivity Program — ended in 2024 and is no longer available. Don't be misled by anyone advertising it as current.

What remains is still worthwhile: a long-standing federal discount called Lifeline, low-cost plans offered directly by internet companies, senior-focused options, and the free internet and devices available through your public library. We'll go through each and how to apply.

- The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) ended in 2024 — it's gone; don't count on it.
- The federal Lifeline program still offers a monthly discount for those who qualify.
- Internet companies offer their own low-cost plans for qualifying households.
- Your public library provides free internet, computers, and sometimes hotspots to borrow.

WATCH OUT

Because programs change and scammers exploit the confusion, verify anything you're told against an official source — for Lifeline, that's the government's own site, lifelinesupport.org. If someone pressures you or asks for payment to "sign you up," stop; the real programs don't work that way.

2 An Honest Word on Programs That Come and Go

Government help with internet and phone bills has shifted in recent years, and that's caused a lot of confusion. The Affordable Connectivity Program gave millions of households a monthly internet discount, but its funding ran out and it stopped in 2024. As of now, it has not been brought back.

This matters because plenty of websites and even some mailings still mention ACP as if it's active, and scammers use its name to trick people. Knowing it's ended protects you from both wasted effort and outright fraud.

WATCH OUT

If you see an ad, email, or letter offering to sign you up for "free internet" through the ACP, treat it with suspicion — that program has ended. Real help comes from the programs in this guide, applied for through official channels, and never requires paying a fee to enroll.

3 Lifeline — The Main Federal Discount

Lifeline is a federal program that has existed for decades and is still running. It provides a monthly discount — commonly around nine dollars — on either a phone or an internet bill for households that qualify. It's modest, but it's real, ongoing help, and it's applied right to your bill.

- Lifeline gives a monthly discount on one service — phone or internet — per household.
- The benefit is larger for households on qualifying tribal lands.
- It's applied through a participating phone or internet company.
- It's one discount per household, not per person.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Lifeline's exact amounts and rules can be adjusted over time by the government, so treat any specific dollar figure as approximate and confirm the current benefit when you apply. What's durable is that the program exists and provides a monthly discount to those who qualify.

4 Do You Qualify for Lifeline?

You can qualify for Lifeline either through your income or by being enrolled in certain assistance programs. If any of these apply to your household, it's worth checking.

- You take part in programs like SNAP (food assistance), Medicaid, SSI, or certain veterans' benefits.
- Your household income is at or below the program's limit (based on the federal poverty guidelines).
- Someone in your household participates in a qualifying tribal program.
- If you're unsure, the official application will tell you whether you qualify.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If you already receive Medicaid, SNAP, or SSI, you very likely qualify for Lifeline — those are among the most common qualifying programs. Being on any one of them is usually enough; you don't need to meet every condition.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

5 How to Apply for Lifeline

Applying goes through the official national verifier and then a participating company. Doing it through the official site keeps you safe from the scams that cluster around these programs.

1. Start at the official site, lifelinesupport.org, and use "Apply" or the National Verifier.
2. Prove you qualify (through a program you're in, or your income).
3. Once approved, choose a participating phone or internet company.
4. Ask that company to apply your Lifeline benefit to your bill.
5. Recertify each year when asked, so the benefit continues.

WATCH OUT

Only apply through lifelinesupport.org or a known, participating provider. Never pay a fee to "enroll" — Lifeline is free to apply for. Anyone charging you to sign up, or asking for unusual personal information, is running a scam, not the program.

6 Low-Cost Plans From Internet Companies

Separately from any government program, the big internet companies offer their own low-cost plans for qualifying households. These are run by the companies themselves, so availability and price depend on your address and which company serves your area.

- Major providers run their own discounted internet plans for eligible households.
- Qualifying usually ties to programs like SNAP, SSI, or having school-age children.
- Availability and exact price depend on your address and provider.

- Ask your current provider directly whether they have a low-income plan.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> These company programs go by various names — things like a provider's "Internet Assist," "Access," or "Connect" plan. Because the details vary by company and change over time, the reliable move is to call your provider and ask plainly: "Do you have a low-income or assistance internet plan, and do I qualify?"

7 Low-Cost Phone Options

For phone service, besides Lifeline, there are low-cost carriers and senior-focused plans that can cut your bill substantially. These don't require qualifying for a program — they're simply cheaper.

- Smaller carriers run on the big networks but cost far less for light users.
- Some carriers offer plans aimed specifically at seniors.
- Lifeline can be applied to a phone bill if you qualify.
- A companion guide covers lowering any phone bill in detail.

> **TIP**
>
> If money is tight, combining approaches works best: apply Lifeline to the service you need most, and move your phone to a low-cost carrier. Together these can bring a previously painful bill down to something genuinely manageable.

8 Ohio's Golden Buckeye Card

Ohio offers the Golden Buckeye Card to residents aged 60 and older (and to certain adults with disabilities). It isn't an internet or phone program, but it's a free card worth having, because it provides discounts at many participating businesses and can help with prescription costs.

- It's free for Ohio residents 60 and older.
- It offers discounts at participating local businesses and prescription savings.

- It's not specifically an internet or phone discount, but it eases other costs.
- Your local library or county office for older adults can help you get one.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Think of the Golden Buckeye Card as freeing up room in your budget rather than discounting your internet directly. Every dollar saved on prescriptions or local purchases is a dollar that can go toward the bills — and it's free to have, so there's no reason not to.

9 Your Public Library: Free Internet and Devices

Your public library is one of the most valuable and overlooked resources for staying connected on a budget. In Portage County and across Ohio, libraries offer far more than books.

- Free Wi-Fi at the library, and often reaching the parking lot for after-hours use.
- Free public computers with internet you can use for appointments and forms.
- Many libraries lend out Wi-Fi hotspots you can take home for a few weeks.
- Free help from librarians with getting online and using devices.

> **TIP**
>
> If home internet is simply out of reach for now, a borrowed library hotspot can bridge the gap at no cost. Call your local library and ask: "Do you lend Wi-Fi hotspots, and is there a waiting list?" It's a genuinely helpful, little-known service.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

10 Free Wi-Fi and Community Resources

Beyond the library, free internet access is more available than many realize, which can reduce how much data or service you need to pay for.

- Many community centers, senior centers, and churches offer free Wi-Fi.
- Senior centers and county offices for older adults can point you to local help.
- Some clinics and government offices have public internet for forms and portals.
- Free calling and video apps over any Wi-Fi keep you in touch at no cost.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ohio's county offices and area agencies on aging exist partly to connect older residents with exactly these kinds of resources. A single call to the one serving Portage County can surface help you'd never find on your own.

11 Discounts You May Already Qualify For

Separate from need-based programs, there are everyday discounts anyone can ask for that lower connectivity costs. These are about simply asking the right questions.

- Autopay and paperless billing discounts on internet and phone.
- Senior or age-based plans at several phone carriers.
- Bundling or loyalty discounts for long-time customers.
- Membership-based discounts through clubs or organizations you belong to.

TIP

When you call any provider, ask directly: "What's the lowest-cost plan I qualify for, and what discounts am I not currently getting?" You'll be surprised how often simply asking produces a lower bill, no program required.

12 Avoid the Scams Around 'Government' Offers

Sadly, discounts and "free" offers attract scammers, who prey especially on older adults and those stretched thin. A few rules keep you safe while you pursue the real help.

- Real programs never charge a fee to enroll — walk away from anyone who does.
- Don't give personal details to someone who called or messaged you out of the blue.
- Be suspicious of "free government phone/internet" ads promising more than seems real.
- Verify any program through its official website or your provider directly.

WATCH OUT

A genuine program doesn't cold-call you, doesn't demand payment to sign up, and doesn't pressure you to act immediately. If an offer has any of those features, it's a scam using a real program's name — hang up, and apply through official channels instead.

13 Put Together a Plan That Fits You

With several options on the table, the best approach is usually to combine a few rather than hunt for one magic program. Here's a simple way to think about which pieces fit your situation.

Your situation	Worth pursuing
On Medicaid, SNAP, or SSI	Apply for Lifeline; ask providers about low-income plans
Age 60+ in Ohio	Get a Golden Buckeye Card; ask carriers about senior plans
Home internet is a stretch	Borrow a library hotspot; use free Wi-Fi where you can

Just paying too much	Ask every provider for their lowest plan and all discounts

GOOD TO KNOW

No single program solves everything, and that's fine. Stacking a Lifeline discount, a cheaper carrier, and free library resources often adds up to far more relief than any one program alone — and most people qualify for more than they expect.

14 When to Call Bill

These programs can be confusing, the applications can be fiddly, and the fear of scams is completely reasonable. If you'd like a trustworthy hand to sort out what you actually qualify for and apply safely, I'm glad to help — and I'll only ever point you to the real, official programs.

I'll sit down with you, figure out which discounts and programs fit your situation, help you apply through the official channels, call your providers with you to ask for their low-cost plans, and make sure nobody's trying to scam you along the way. We'll put together a plan that genuinely lowers what you pay.

- You want help figuring out which programs you actually qualify for.
- You'd like a hand applying for Lifeline through the official site.
- You want to call your internet or phone provider about a low-cost plan.
- You've gotten a "free government internet" offer and want to know if it's real.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. The ACP ended in 2024 — these are what's real now.

I want to...	Do this...
Get the federal discount	Apply for Lifeline at lifelinesupport.org (free; one per household)
Know if I qualify	On Medicaid, SNAP, or SSI? You likely qualify for Lifeline
Find a low-cost internet plan	Ask your provider: 'Do you have a low-income or assistance plan?'
Help as an Ohio senior	Get a free Golden Buckeye Card (age 60+) for other discounts
Get online for free	Library Wi-Fi, free public computers, and borrowable hotspots
Stay safe	Never pay a fee to enroll; verify through official sites
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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