

# Phone Bill Assistance Guide

Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties - practical programs to try first

**Purpose:** Help neighbors keep a working phone for safety, jobs, medical care, recovery support, shelters, and family contact.

**Important reality:** Direct cell-phone bill help is limited. The most reliable recurring phone help is Lifeline. For a one-time urgent phone bill, start with smaller local charities and resource centers first, then larger programs. Many emergency funds pay utilities, rent, transportation, or other basic needs, which may keep the phone from being shut off indirectly.

**Do not send people to ACP as an active program.** The Affordable Connectivity Program ended for now, effective June 1, 2024. Lifeline is still active.

## What to have ready before calling

- Photo ID if available; full name, date of birth, address, county and ZIP.
- Current phone bill, account number, provider name, amount due and shutoff date if any.
- Proof of income or hardship if available: pay stub, benefit letter, unemployment, SSI/SSDI, SNAP/Medicaid proof, lease, utility bills or eviction/shutoff notices.
- A short explanation: "I need my phone to stay active for medical calls, job contact, shelter/resource contact, recovery support, and safety."
- Ask: "If you cannot pay a phone bill, can you cover another urgent bill or connect me to a program that can?"

## Statewide phone-specific options

### Lifeline - official phone/internet discount

Phone: 800-234-9473 Lifeline Support Center | Web: [www.lifelinesupport.org/](http://www.lifelinesupport.org/)

**Best for:** Best direct option for recurring phone bill help or a low-cost/free phone plan.

**What to ask for:** Directly lowers the monthly cost of phone, internet, or bundled service. Standard benefit is up to \$9.25/month; only one Lifeline-supported service per household. Qualify by programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, FPHA/Section 8, Veterans Pension/Survivor Benefit, Tribal programs, or qualifying income.

### South Carolina ORS Lifeline provider list

Phone: See provider list | Web: [ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline](http://ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline)

**Best for:** Best for choosing a real provider serving South Carolina.

**What to ask for:** South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff lists Lifeline wireless and landline companies and phone numbers, including Access Wireless, Assurance Wireless, enTouch/Feelsafe, Life Wireless, SafeLink, StandUp, TAG Mobile, Home Telecom, St. Stephen Telephone/TDS and others.

### SC 211

Phone: Dial 211 or search online | Web: [sc211.org/](http://sc211.org/)

**Best for:** Best updated directory when local funds change.

**What to ask for:** Free, confidential, 24/7/365 statewide connection to local health and social services. Use it to search active programs by ZIP and need.

### Findhelp.org searches

Phone: Online search by ZIP | Web: [www.findhelp.org/](http://www.findhelp.org/)

**Best for:** Best backup search tool when 211 does not show enough detail.

**What to ask for:** Search by ZIP for "phone", "financial assistance", "emergency payments", and "help pay for utilities". Results often show whether phone bills are included and current contact instructions.

## Berkeley County

Smaller/local options are listed first. Use the Berkeley Center for Strong Families when you need current referral guidance before calling multiple agencies.

### Helping Hands of Goose Creek

**Small local charity - try early** | Phone: 843-553-7132 | Web: [helpinghandsofgoosecreek.org/](http://helpinghandsofgoosecreek.org/)

**Best for:** Berkeley County neighbors in a life crisis, especially Goose Creek/Ladson area.

**What to ask for:** Emergency assistance center and food pantry. Ask if current crisis assistance can help with a phone bill, or if they can connect the client to a smaller local fund. Food support can also free up cash to keep a phone active.

**Important:** Hours change; their site says to check Facebook or the linked calendar for last-minute shifts.

Source: Helping Hands official site / Berkeley Chamber listing.

### Trident United Way - Berkeley Center for Strong Families

**Resource navigator** | Phone: 843-761-6033 | Web: [www.tuw.org/berkeley-county-help-resources](http://www.tuw.org/berkeley-county-help-resources)

**Best for:** Anyone in Berkeley County who needs help finding the right payer.

**What to ask for:** Free family coaching and connection to food, rental assistance, housing and utility support, benefits, employment resources, health services and financial stability programs.

**Important:** Call before going. They can help prevent wasted calls by identifying active partners.

Source: Trident United Way Berkeley County Help Resources.

### ShelterNet referral organizations

**Referral-only emergency relief** | Phone: Use a listed referral partner | Web: [www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet](http://www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet)

**Best for:** Households at risk of losing housing or essential utilities.

**What to ask for:** Past-due rent or utility bills; works in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester. A referral organization must submit the application. Checks go to the billing source, not the client.

**Important:** Phone bills are not the main use, but if a phone is tied to housing stability or the client also has utility arrears, this is worth asking a referral partner about.

Source: Humanities Foundation ShelterNet page.

### Palmetto Community Action Partnership

**Community action agency** | Phone: 1-844-769-6448 | Web: [palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/](http://palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/)

**Best for:** Low-income households needing utility assistance and stabilization.

**What to ask for:** LIHEAP utility assistance and other emergency/community action services for Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties.

**Important:** Appointments are limited and released online/phone. This is not usually phone-bill-specific, but it can free up money for phone service.

Source: Palmetto CAP LIHEAP and appointment pages.

## Charleston County

Smaller and more targeted organizations are listed first. Match the neighbor by service area to avoid wasted calls.

### James Island Outreach

**Small local charity - very targeted** | Phone: 843-762-3653 | Web: [www.jioutreach.org/financial-assistance](http://www.jioutreach.org/financial-assistance)

**Best for:** James Island 29412 or Folly Beach 29439 residents who already use the pantry.

**What to ask for:** Limited emergency financial assistance for critical needs with utility bills or housing; clients submit a copy of the bill with the application.

**Important:** Only for James Island/Folly Beach. Applications during posted assistance hours. Ask if phone can be considered under emergency need or if another bill can be covered.

Source: James Island Outreach official financial assistance page.

### East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO)

**Local charity - East Cooper** | Phone: 843-849-9220 | Web: [eccocharleston.org/financial-assistance/](http://eccocharleston.org/financial-assistance/)

**Best for:** Neighbors living or working East of the Cooper River.

**What to ask for:** Financial assistance for utility bills, rent/mortgage, benefits navigation, food, clothing, and medical/dental support for eligible clients.

**Important:** Assistance is not guaranteed and is generally once every two years; a Client Navigator follows up.

Source: ECCO official financial assistance and eligibility pages.

### Neighbors Together

**Local charity** | Phone: 843-747-1788 | Web: [neighborstogether.org/rent-and-utilities/](http://neighborstogether.org/rent-and-utilities/)

**Best for:** North Charleston and nearby Lowcountry neighbors with a temporary financial setback.

**What to ask for:** Limited financial assistance for rent, utilities, transportation and other basic needs by appointment.

**Important:** Applications reviewed Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10-1. Call for appointment availability.

Source: Neighbors Together official rent and utility assistance page.

### Catholic Charities of South Carolina - Emergency Assistance

**Faith-based charity** | Phone: 843-531-5570 / email [ccharities@charlestondiocese.org](mailto:ccharities@charlestondiocese.org) | Web: [www.charitiessc.org/copy-of-clean-of-heart](http://www.charitiessc.org/copy-of-clean-of-heart)

**Best for:** Households needing utility assistance and emergency stabilization.

**What to ask for:** Emergency assistance with utilities through the Charleston-area Catholic Charities office.

**Important:** Funding and appointment availability vary. Ask directly about phone bill, bundled phone/internet, or whether they can cover another bill to prevent loss of phone service.

Source: Catholic Charities of South Carolina Emergency Assistance page.

### Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach

**Local charity - confirm first** | Phone: 843-805-8064 | Web: [www.olmoutreach.org/get-help/](http://www.olmoutreach.org/get-help/)

**Best for:** Charleston/Johns Island neighbors needing whole-person support.

**What to ask for:** Website lists financial assistance for rent, mortgage, utilities or critical home repair, plus food, clothing, benefits help and referrals.

**Important:** Status can change; their contact page has shown temporary limits on rent/utility help. Call first before sending someone.

Source: OLM Community Outreach get-help/contact pages.

### The Salvation Army - Charleston Corps

**Established charity** | Phone: 843-747-5271 | Web: [www.salvationarmyusa.org/sc/charleston/ashley-river-rd-corps/](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/sc/charleston/ashley-river-rd-corps/)

**Best for:** People needing utility/rent assistance and emergency support.

**What to ask for:** Utility/rent assistance may be available depending on funding and eligibility.

**Important:** Funds can be exhausted; call before travel. Charleston County Library also lists Salvation Army under utility assistance.

Source: Salvation Army Charleston Corps and CCPL financial assistance page.

### ShelterNet referral organizations

**Referral-only emergency relief** | Phone: Use a listed referral partner | Web: [www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet](http://www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet)

**Best for:** Households at risk of losing housing or essential utilities.

**What to ask for:** Past-due rent or utility bills; works in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester. A referral organization must submit the application.

**Important:** Phone bills are not the primary use, but referral partners can screen for eligible utility/housing stabilization needs.

Source: Humanities Foundation ShelterNet page.

### Palmetto Community Action Partnership

**Community action agency** | Phone: 1-844-769-6448 | Web: [palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/](http://palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/)

**Best for:** Low-income households needing utility help and stabilization.

**What to ask for:** LIHEAP utility assistance and emergency services for Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties.

**Important:** Not phone-specific, but can protect the household budget. Try appointments on Fridays at 8 a.m. per Palmetto CAP guidance.

Source: Palmetto CAP LIHEAP / Schedule an Appointment pages.

## Dorchester County

Start with HELP of Summerville and the Dorchester Center for Strong Families for current local navigation.

### HELP of Summerville

**Small local charity - try early** | Phone: 843-566-7040 via Resource Connection | Web: [helpofsummerville.org/](http://helpofsummerville.org/)

**Best for:** Lower Dorchester / Summerville-area households in financial crisis.

**What to ask for:** Fast payment of one-off expenses to help individuals and families get through difficult times; website tells people needing assistance to contact Resource Connection.

**Important:** Good first call for small urgent gaps. Ask specifically about phone bill, disconnection risk, or paying another critical bill to stabilize the household.

Source: HELP of Summerville official site.

### Trident United Way - Dorchester Center for Strong Families

**Resource navigator** | Phone: 843-566-7040 | Web: [www.tuw.org/dorchester-county-help-resources](http://www.tuw.org/dorchester-county-help-resources)

**Best for:** Anyone in Dorchester County who needs help finding the right payer.

**What to ask for:** Free family coaching and connection to food, rental assistance, housing and utility support, benefits, employment resources and financial stability programs.

**Important:** Call before going. A family coach can help identify current active programs and avoid dead-end referrals.

Source: Trident United Way Dorchester County Help Resources.

### ShelterNet referral organizations

**Referral-only emergency relief** | Phone: Use a listed referral partner | Web: [www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet](http://www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet)

**Best for:** Households at risk of losing housing or essential utilities.

**What to ask for:** Past-due rent or utility bills; works in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester. A referral organization must submit the application.

**Important:** Phone bills are not the main use, but referral partners can screen for utility/housing stability options.

Source: Humanities Foundation ShelterNet page.

### Palmetto Community Action Partnership

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**Best for:** Low-income households needing utility help and stabilization.

**What to ask for:** LIHEAP utility assistance and emergency services for Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties.

**Important:** Appointments are limited and no walk-ins. Not phone-specific, but can free money for phone service.

Source: Palmetto CAP LIHEAP page.

## Best search websites for updated results

Use these instead of old static resource sheets. Search by ZIP and call before sending someone in person.

### SC 211

**Updated search/entry point** | Web: [sc211.org/](https://sc211.org/)

**Best for:** Use when direct agency funds are uncertain.

**What to ask for:** Search statewide resources or dial 211. Best for active, updated local referrals.

**Important:** Verify availability before travel.

Source: Official website

### Findhelp.org

**Updated search/entry point** | Web: [www.findhelp.org/](https://www.findhelp.org/)

**Best for:** Use when direct agency funds are uncertain.

**What to ask for:** Search "phone", "emergency payments", "financial assistance", and "help pay for utilities" by ZIP.

**Important:** Verify availability before travel.

Source: Official website

### Lifeline Support

**Updated search/entry point** | Web: [www.lifelinesupport.org/](https://www.lifelinesupport.org/)

**Best for:** Use when direct agency funds are uncertain.

**What to ask for:** Official consumer site for Lifeline application, eligibility, recertification and provider search.

**Important:** Verify availability before travel.

Source: Official website

### South Carolina ORS Lifeline page

**Updated search/entry point** | Web: [ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline](https://ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline)

**Best for:** Use when direct agency funds are uncertain.

**What to ask for:** South Carolina provider list and phone numbers for wireless and landline Lifeline companies.

**Important:** Verify availability before travel.

Source: Official website

### Palmetto CAP appointment system

**Updated search/entry point** | Web: [palmettocap.org/schedule-an-appointment/](https://palmettocap.org/schedule-an-appointment/)

**Best for:** Use when direct agency funds are uncertain.

**What to ask for:** Appointments for utility assistance and related community action programs.

**Important:** Verify availability before travel.

Source: Official website

## Quick triage script for coordinators

"I am helping someone keep phone service active because it is needed for safety, medical care, job contact and resource coordination. Do you have any current emergency funds that can pay a phone bill directly, help with a bundled phone/internet bill, or pay another urgent household bill so they can keep the phone active? If not, who is currently taking referrals for this county?"

## Sources checked

Verified online May 2026. Funding and intake rules change often; always call or check the website before referral.

SC 211	<a href="https://sc211.org/">sc211.org/</a>
South Carolina ORS Lifeline	<a href="https://ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline">ors.sc.gov/consumers/telecommunications/lifeline</a>
Lifeline Support / USAC	<a href="https://www.lifelinesupport.org/">www.lifelinesupport.org/</a>
FCC ACP ended notice	<a href="https://www.fcc.gov/acp">www.fcc.gov/acp</a>

Trident United Way Berkeley Center	<a href="http://www.tuw.org/berkeley-county-help-resources">www.tuw.org/berkeley-county-help-resources</a>
Trident United Way Dorchester Center	<a href="http://www.tuw.org/dorchester-county-help-resources">www.tuw.org/dorchester-county-help-resources</a>
Trident United Way guidance on asking early	<a href="http://www.tuw.org/news/ask-for-help">www.tuw.org/news/ask-for-help</a>
Palmetto CAP LIHEAP	<a href="http://palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/">palmettocap.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program/</a>
ShelterNet	<a href="http://www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet">www.humanitiesfoundation.org/shelternet</a>
Helping Hands of Goose Creek	<a href="http://helpinghandsofgoosecreek.org/">helpinghandsofgoosecreek.org/</a>
HELP of Summerville	<a href="http://helpofsummerville.org/">helpofsummerville.org/</a>
James Island Outreach	<a href="http://www.jioutreach.org/financial-assistance">www.jioutreach.org/financial-assistance</a>
ECCO	<a href="http://eccocharleston.org/financial-assistance/">eccocharleston.org/financial-assistance/</a>
Neighbors Together	<a href="http://neighborstogether.org/rent-and-utilities/">neighborstogether.org/rent-and-utilities/</a>
Catholic Charities SC Emergency Assistance	<a href="http://www.charitiessc.org/copy-of-clean-of-heart">www.charitiessc.org/copy-of-clean-of-heart</a>
Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach	<a href="http://www.olmoutreach.org/get-help/">www.olmoutreach.org/get-help/</a>
Salvation Army Charleston Corps	<a href="http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/sc/charleston/ashley-river-rd-corps/">www.salvationarmyusa.org/sc/charleston/ashley-river-rd-corps/</a>
Charleston County Public Library financial assistance page	<a href="http://www.ccpl.org/letushelp/community-support-financial-assistance">www.ccpl.org/letushelp/community-support-financial-assistance</a>