

Proposal to Change ARRL Bylaw #7

*Submitted to the ARRL Administration & Finance Committee
by Stephen Aberle, WA7PTM, ARRL Life Member, ASM WWA Section, OES*

Amateur radio has long been viewed as a hobby for those who are financially secure. However, in my work with people taking license classes, youth, ARES/RACES, and tribal nations, I see that we are attracting people into the amateur radio hobby who are long on time and talent, but short on financial treasure. This is especially the case with some emergency communicators who struggle to afford a low-end Chinese handheld.

Gaining an amateur radio license does not insure one against ever dipping into poverty. In fact, most Americans will spend at least one year below the poverty line at some point between ages 25 and 75 [reference: Hacker, J. S. (2006). *The great risk shift: The new insecurity and the decline of the American dream*. New York: Oxford University Press (USA)]. In every year since I was first licensed in 1970, the national poverty rate has exceeded 11% [reference: <http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/time-series/historical-poverty-people/hstpov9.xls>].

ARRL Bylaw #7 currently establishes a “special dues rate” (without receipt of QST) for people who are (a) legally blind and (b) a close relative of, and living at the same address as, a regular member or a Life Member. This proposal would add a new sub-section which extends that same no-QST membership rate to radio amateurs living below the poverty line. The precise wording could be as simple as: “(c) is living in a family whose income falls below the U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines as published annually in the Federal Register by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).”

Why would the ARRL do this? First and foremost, this is an outreach to members of the amateur radio community who could not otherwise afford membership. Second, this is a stepping stone to encourage regular (Bylaw #4) membership in the future. Third, it will make for good Public Relations (i.e. the ARRL is inclusive organization, not an exclusive one). Fourth, without QST, there is little cost involved, especially since they would be paying something, not nothing. Fifth, it will boost organization's membership total.

What are the current HHS poverty levels? As published January 25, 2016, in accordance with 42 USC §9902(2), the 2016 poverty guidelines for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia are:

Persons	Poverty guideline
1	\$11,880
2	\$16,020
3	\$20,160
4	\$24,300
5	\$28,440
6	\$32,580
7	\$36,730
8	\$40,890

[reference: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>]. Index values are slightly higher for Alaska and Hawaii.

Just because someone lives below the poverty line, doesn't at all imply they cannot make significant contributions to public service, training, and other aspects of amateur radio. If these people were to choose between a entry-level radio and a regular membership, which would it be? And the following year, are they more likely to buy an external antenna and coax to go with their radio, or join the ARRL? It isn't a matter of desire, but one of financial inability.