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July 14, 2020

Chair DeAnn T. Walker
Commissioner Arthur C. D'Andrea
Commissioner Shelly Botkin
Public Utility Commission of Texas
P.O. Box 13326
Austin, Texas 78711-3326



Re: The Need for the Sustainability of the Texas Universal Service Fund

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing expressing my concern regarding the current financial state of the Texas Universal Service Fund (the "Fund") and the need to sustain the fund well into the future. I am grateful for your expertise in regulatory matters, and therefore, I will forego enumerating why the Texas Legislature created the Fund, its intended purposes and the eleven important programs it sustains. Instead, I want to highlight why the Fund still matters today.

The Fund, in part, provides a revenue stream to rural telecommunication companies in their delivery of services to rural Texans. Now is the time to sustain the Fund.

For instance, in the Texas Panhandle there are four rural telecom providers that serve 42,431 households. These four providers also each provide internet connectivity. Their geographic service area is approximately 18,344 square miles; an area larger than nine U.S. states, including Maryland at 12,406 square miles.

In this challenging time of COVID-19, all Texans have been and continue to be impacted in significant and dramatic ways. Practically, all delivery systems in our society have had to pivot from how we educate, from how we deliver healthcare, and from how we work, including that our work jargon now references various types of virtual meetings, something that the Commission has also encountered. The common thread to all of these is telecommunications, including broadband connectivity. Our society's shift to virtual based delivery systems has also further highlighted the great digital divide between those geographic areas of high digital connectivity and those who are still unserved or underserved.

I respectfully urge you to consider all the options available and act to sustain the Texas Universal Service Fund.

Sincerely,

Four Price
State Representative