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TEXAS HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

James White

*House District 19
Jasper, Newton, Hardin, Polk, Tyler*

CORRECTIONS
CHAIR

REDISTRICTING

JUDICIARY &
CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

July 24, 2020

Commissioners
Public Utility Commission of Texas
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78711



RE: Project No. 50796

Dear Chairman Walker, Commissioner D'Andrea, and Commissioner Botkin,

First, on behalf of the constituents in Texas House District 19, and personally, thank you for your service and leadership during these exceptional challenging and unique times. Defeating COVID-19 and growing our local prosperity in the future will demand reliable sources of communication, electricity, and water.

Therefore, I am writing to you today pertaining to the funding and funding level of the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF). Any decision that does not adequately fund all programs within the TUSF is in direct contradiction to well-established public policy and the law. Without the TUSF, we will jeopardize access to dependable and affordable communications services in more than 50 percent of the state. TUSF, the high-cost and small and rural programs in particular, is what has given the opportunity for small and rural telecommunications providers to build and maintain the foundational network platform that allows rural Texas to remain connected. Without it, that network would fail.

Before, but certainly with the current pandemic crisis, these small rural telecommunications carriers have stepped up to help provide the critical services needed as our citizens face a more "online" environment. The ability to work, learn, and even seek healthcare from home would not be possible without the networks provided with the support of TUSF. We must not place rural communications and communities at a competitive disadvantage as we are relying more on 21st century telecommunications to keep rural Texans healthy, safe, and educated.

For example, throughout rural Southeast Texas, local education leaders are trying desperately to close the post-Information Age technology gap in order to provide parents, students, and teachers a genuine choice in having a quality education on-campus or at home online. The PUC's funding of the TUSF is critical in accomplishing this goal.

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Legislature has provided the PUC the tools to maintain the fund. Teachers, medical professionals, and mental health providers are expecting the PUC to fulfill the statutory requirement.

I ask now that you take action to maintain adequate TUSF funding levels. Just as we are expecting the PUC to facilitate rural Texas' emergence into the 21st century, Texas should expect the Legislature to continue analyzing and modernizing the TUSF.

Again, I appreciate the Commission's efforts and leadership during this time and in advance, thank you for your responsiveness to rural 21st century connectivity.

For God & Texas!

James White
State Representative
House District 19