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Tracy O. King  
State Representative



7/28/20

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, thank you for your service and leadership as you oversee the critical infrastructure of Texas. As each Texan faces the challenges associated with the COVID-19 virus, they must be provided with every opportunity to rise to the challenges presented. Without access to reliable sources of electricity, water, and communications, meeting these added challenges would and will not be possible.

I write to you today specifically regarding an issue that was recently discussed pertaining to the funding and funding level of the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF) and to remind you that 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 TUSF, access to dependable and affordable communications services will be jeopardized across more than 50% of the state. The 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 backbone network that allows rural Texas to remain connected. Without it, that network would fail.

Before, but certainly with the current pandemic crisis, we have witnessed these small rural telecommunications carriers step 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 the TUSF. We must not place rural communications and communities in jeopardy.

Many of my colleagues have provided similar letters emphasizing the importance of the TUSF and its receiving its adequate funding. I join that effort. The Legislature has already provided the PUC the tools to maintain the fund, and now it is time for you to take the action to do exactly that. By increasing the assessment level, as has been proposed, continuity of the communications network can be maintained. Other options can be explored in an appropriate fashion for long-term viability, including keeping the higher assessment rate, or expanding the contribution base. I ask now that you take action to adequately maintain the TUSF. Should further legislative action be needed in the 87th Legislature to modernize the contribution methodology for the TUSF, I will stand with rural Texas to address those issues and work to maintain the critical communications services that are needed.

Again, I appreciate the Commission's efforts and leadership during this time. I trust that you will make appropriate choices to ensure the law is followed and that all of Texas maintains the connectivity that is desperately needed.

Sincerely,

Tracy O. King