

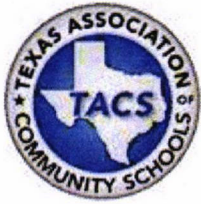


Control Number: 50796



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Texas Association of Community Schools

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Barry Haenisch, Executive Director

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2020 APR 21 PM 2:25
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
FILING CLERK

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

Re: Project 50796

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

An article published on April 1, 2020, in the **Texas Tribune** verified a fact that most Texans already knew- "...rural Texas lags far behind the rest of the state in access to the internet...". The Texas Association of Community Schools (TACS) is an organization of approximately 600 school districts. We advocate for solutions to issues that benefit the small and mid-sized school districts in our state. Most of our members are located in rural areas, and access to dependable telecommunications is a priority of TACS and of our members.

The COVID pandemic has presented many obstacles that school districts have had to overcome to provide a quality education to their students. No challenge has been greater for rural school leaders than the lack of internet access or, at the least, poor quality internet connections in rural homes. Not only has internet access become essential to rural schools as they strive to communicate with parents, other school leaders, and their regional Education Service Center, but it is vital for the educating of students in this age of remote/blended learning. Rural telecommunications companies and co-ops are our state's rural schools' lifeline, and support these programs due to being beneficiaries of the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF).

The TUSF is crucial if rural providers and co-ops are to continue to support rural Texans. Without TUSF the survival of not only small rural telecommunication companies and co-ops would be threatened, but also the survival of rural school districts. It is a proven fact, when rural schools close, their communities dwindle. Therefore, the TUSF is important to not only rural Texas but to all of Texas! TACS supports a strong Texas, and that means we support a strong permanent TUSF. Your efforts to ensure that the TUSF remains adequately funded is critical to its viability and to our state.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barry Haenisch".

Barry Haenisch, Executive Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Crystal Dockery".

Crystal Dockery, Deputy Executive Director