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August 12, 2021

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711

RE: Texas Universal Service Fund

Dear Governor Abbott,

As you are aware, in today's world, communication services are no longer a luxury in rural Texas, but a basic necessity of life. This has been highlighted even more so during the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout one of the most prolific winter storms we have experienced in Texas in nearly 60 years.

The networks that have been put in place by local cooperatives and small independent providers are the pipeline by which our citizens are given the opportunity to thrive. It allows our businesses to stay connected to the world and the access and ability to run technologically advanced equipment. It allows those that live in these areas to have access to telemedicine, e-commerce and educational experiences that would not be possible without them. These networks also highlight another area of rural contribution to the state by providing the backbone for transport of communications services between urban areas as well.

Without a stable Texas Universal Service Fund ("TUSF"), none of this would be possible. If our local communications providers are forced to replace TUSF support with rate increases, their services would no longer be affordable for those in the rural areas that cover more than 50% of the state. Many family-owned and rural businesses, not only farmers, but a multitude of businesses and schools, would have to reconsider their way of life and how they operate.

It is our understanding the PUC has all necessary authority and has had ample opportunity to make sure the TUSF is adequately funded but has taken no action to date to do so. While we understand the hesitancy to raise any type of assessment, especially during times of hardship like we have experienced over the last year, the alternative is detrimental. Further, broadband legislation such as HB 5 has a more difficult chance of success and arguably would be more expensive if the state allows existing networks to fail or services to become unaffordable.

We respectfully urge you to direct the PUC to swiftly take all necessary action to set the TUSF assessment to a level necessary to fund all programs required by law. While other long-term solutions for funding may become available, action must be taken now to allow time for those solutions to be considered. If the rural communications network fails, rural Texas fails.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Association of Rural Communities in Texas
Exotic Wildlife Association
Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.
South Texas Cotton & Grain Association
Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Texas Agricultural Cooperative Council
Texas Agricultural Irrigation Association
Texas Association of Dairyman
Texas Corn Producers Association
Texas Cotton Association
Texas Cotton Ginners' Association
Texas Farm Bureau
Texas Forestry Association
Texas Grain and Feed Association
Texas Grain Sorghum Association
Texas Independent Ginners Association
Texas International Produce Association
Texas Logging Council
Texas Nursery & Landscape Association
Texas Poultry Federation
Texas Rice Council
Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers' Association
Texas Soybean Association
Texas Wheat Producers Association

CC: Lt. Governor Dan Patrick
Speaker Dade Phelan