



Control Number: 50664



Item Number: 10

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March 18, 2020

Public Utility Commission of Texas
1701 N. Congress Ave.
Austin, Texas 78701

RE: Project No. 50664, *Issues Related to the State of Disaster for Coronavirus Disease 2019*

Commissioners,

As the United States grapples with the challenges created by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas telecommunications industry is ramping up efforts to safeguard the strength of its networks and the health and wellbeing of its workforce, customers, and local communities. The Texas Telephone Association (“TTA”) recognizes the vital role that rural telecommunications providers have during this ongoing public health emergency.

Because TTA members operate in rural communities across the state, their employees and customers – including government agencies, businesses, hospitals, law enforcement, educational institutions and consumers – remain their top priority in this rapidly evolving crisis. Across the state, our members are actively working with federal, state and local government officials and community leaders to understand the impact of the coronavirus and remain on top of current developments. Some specific steps TTA has taken are described below, and TTA’s response is also explained in a video I recorded, available here: <http://www.tta.org/tta-board-president-rusty-moore-provides-update-on-telecommunications-industry-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>.

Regarding employee health and well-being, TTA has recommended member companies advise employees of risk and mitigation strategies consistent with guidance from [recommendations](#) from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many members—particularly in areas directly impacted by COVID-19—are taking additional steps to further protect employees.

Regarding customer health and well-being, TTA has endorsed the Federal Communications Commission [Keep Americans Connected Pledge](#). Pledging companies have agreed for a period of 60 days to waive late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to COVID-19. In addition, such companies pledge not to terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus. Companies taking the pledge also agreed to open any existing Wi-Fi hotspots to anyone who needs them. These commitments will help ensure connectivity and aid rural Texas customers and small businesses facing challenges due to the global health and economic crisis. During these trying times, reliable telecommunications services are enabling Texans from every corner of the state to practice recommended social distancing measures by working from home, using remote or distance learning resources, engaging in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, keeping in

touch with family members and communities remotely, and—perhaps most importantly given the nature of this crisis—accessing telemedicine resources. The industry remains vigilant in monitoring and managing network performance to serve customers in this challenging time.

Regarding communications with the Commission, TTA has encouraged members to keep the Commission informed of their activities through filings in the above-referenced proceeding. TTA has also recommended that its members provide any Emergency Operations Plan reporting in Project No. 37277 consistent with 16 TAC § 26.51, if needed, and report any outages to outages@puc.texas.gov and in Project No. 37275.

If TTA can further assist the Commission or the Texas telecommunications industry during this time, please advise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell A. Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Russell A. Moore
President, TTA Board of Directors
GM / COO, BBT