



Control Number: 50664



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March 20, 2020

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

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

Dear Commissioners:

Peoples Telephone Cooperative, Inc. and its affiliates (collectively, "Peoples") supports its customers during this difficult time. Peoples continues to monitor the outbreak of COVID-19 and business practices that will protect its customers and employees so we can continue to provide reliable telecommunications services to our communities. We recognize the importance of our customers having the ability to stay connected during this time of crisis. The high quality communications services provided by Peoples and its affiliates are enabling its customers and their families to work from home, participate in online classes that have temporarily replaced school classrooms, engage in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, access telemedicine resources, access supply goods and services in this time of crisis and stay in contact with family and friends. Peoples is taking appropriate precautions to ensure the availability of critical services for the duration of this crisis.

During this time of difficulty, Peoples has implemented the following voluntary measures to help all of our customers impacted by COVID-19:

- Peoples has notified Shawn Hazard, Emergency Management Coordinator, of its activation of the Pandemic section of our Emergency Operations Plan ("EOP");
- Peoples is operating under its EOP. Any outages and restoration efforts, if any, will be filed in Project No. 37277 consistent with 16 Tex. Admin. Code § 26.51 ("TAC"). Any outages will also be reported to outages@puc.texas.gov and in Project No. 37275.
- We are participating in the Federal Communications Commission's ("FCC") Keep Americans Connected Pledge.
- For the next 60 days, Peoples:
 - will not disconnect any customer who is unable to pay because their income has been impacted by COVID-19; and
 - will not charge any late payment fees.
- In addition to the measures we are implementing for residential customers, Peoples is also working with all businesses whose income has been impacted by COVID-19 to develop a payment plan that allows them to continue receiving telecommunications services.

With many of our local schools closing for weeks and sometimes the remainder of the school year, Peoples understands the importance of students having connectivity that allows access to distance learning. We have reached out to the local schools in our service areas to inform them that we will provide one month of free broadband service, where available, to any student that currently does not have broadband service. Additionally, for any school where Peoples has facilities to provide 10 Gbps service, we are increasing the school's connection to the full 10 Gbps and for schools that currently are subscribing to less than 1 Gbps, we are increasing their service to 1 Gbps. These increased speeds will be provided at no additional cost to the schools until September 2020. Where Peoples does not currently have the equipment in place to offer a school 10 Gbps service, we are evaluating what equipment would be needed to provide such service. The biggest roadblock right now in procuring this equipment is the delivery time of the equipment. Currently, there is such a demand for the equipment that the delivery time is very long. Peoples is also looking at the need for additional hotspots for schools and community facilities.

In addition to the initiatives listed above, Peoples has taken several steps to ensure the safety of its employees while trying to curb the spread of COVID-19. Some of the measures that Peoples has implemented include:

- On March 20th Peoples closed the lobbies of its Quitman and Winnsboro business offices. Face-to-face meeting with customer service representatives will be by appointment only.
- Customers may continue to make payments at the drive-thru windows, night-drop boxes, by phone, and on-line.
- Peoples 24 hour chat box will continue to be available for customers to ask questions about their service or payments.
- All critical employees have laptops that allow them to work remotely. Peoples currently has some employees working from home in order to accommodate child care issues due to closure of day care providers.
- If required, Peoples is prepared to send all of its employees, with the exception of our dispatch team, home to work remotely. Our dispatch team is responsible for taking all after hour calls, after-hour customer phone payments and for alarm monitoring. Our dispatch team would be isolated since all other employees would be working remotely. Peoples' remote work arrangement will not impact the high quality services that are provided to our customers and that our customers have come to expect.

A number of different agencies have contacted Peoples requesting discounts or the elimination of payment for certain customers, equipment, free service, etc. Peoples takes great care in evaluating each of these requests. Unfortunately, each voluntary measure that Peoples takes to help its customers and communities (e.g. allowing non-pay customers to continue incurring fees that may not be paid, waiving late fees, providing additional equipment and services to the schools and community centers) through this crisis is a cost to Peoples. Because the cost of providing these voluntary measures comes from our operational budget, we have to be very cognizant of our cash flow situation so we don't have to lay off employees. Peoples is very proud of the service it provides and the communities it serves. As demonstrated during this COVID-19 crisis, connectivity is of upmost importance to every Texan and even more so to those Texans that live

in rural areas like those that Peoples serves. This crisis shows how important it is for small, rural companies like Peoples to continue to receive Texas Universal Service Fund support.

To the extent it may be necessary, Peoples respectfully requests Commission action related to the suspension of rules requiring tariff pre-approval to waive installation charges or offer promotions to assist customers during this crisis.

Should the Commission or any customers have questions or concerns, we remain available at 800.333.9779 or steven.steele@gopeoples.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Steele". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Steven Steele
Peoples General Manager and CEO