



Control Number: 50796



Item Number: 35

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July 30, 2020

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



Re: Project 50796

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

The Texas Association of Rural Schools (TARS) is an association of over 300 rural school districts formed around the idea of protecting the viability of rural school districts and the education of their students.

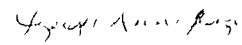
Modern education requires reliable and high capacity connectivity. This will continue to be the case into the future and is especially true during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Rural school districts rely heavily on up-to-date communication services to educate our students, to stay connected to other school districts, vendors and education service centers, as well as to the Texas Education Agency. Loss or a reduction in access to these services could have a disastrous effect on the districts and the students we serve. Moreover, in almost all rural communities the school district is the largest employer and the biggest contributor to the local economic engine. Anything that threatens the local rural school district could in turn threaten the entire local economy. Rural telecommunications companies and co-ops are therefore integral to both rural schools and rural economies.

Key to ensuring that rural telecommunication companies and co-ops continue to support rural Texas school districts is the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF). Without TUSF support rural telecommunication providers would drastically increase costs to school districts threatening local school district budgets which are lean in the best of times and already battered by our COVID-19 response. TUSF is therefore not just key to rural small telecommunication companies and co-ops but to rural school districts as well. TARS therefore supports a robust and permanent TUSF.

We understand that you are considering action to help ensure that the TUSF remains adequately funded. While some may be hesitant to raise any assessment or fee under the current environment, the alternative is disastrous for Texas rural schools and communities. We therefore strongly urge you to take all necessary action to fund the TUSF and maintain its viability.

We thank you for your consideration and service to the people of Texas.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michael Lee in cursive script.Handwritten signature of Leigh Ann Glaze in cursive script.

Michael Lee, Executive Director

Leigh Ann Glaze, Associate Director

Texas Association of Rural Schools