



NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Nebraska Public Service Commission
1200 N Street- Suite 300
Lincoln, NE 68508
psc.nebraska.gov /402.471.3101/ 800.526.0017

NEBRASKA
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON THE STATUS OF THE NEBRASKA TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY



NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
September 30, 2024

Nebraska Public Service Commission
300 The Atrium
1200 N Street
P.O. Box 94927
Lincoln, NE 68509-4927
(402) 417-3101
(800) 526-0017
psc.nebraska.gov



Tim Schram
3rd District
Gretna

Christian Mirch
2nd District
Omaha

Dan Watermeier
1st District
Syracuse
Chair

Kevin Stocker
5th District
Scottsbluff

Eric Kamler
4th District
Geneva
Vice-Chair

General Administration

Thomas Golden/Executive Director
Gregory Walklin/General Counsel
Sallie Dietrich/Senior Counsel
Shana Knutson/Broadband Attorney
Sarah Hulac/Legal Counsel
Jonathan Smith/Attorney
Alex Timperley/Attorney
Brittany Seabrooks/Paralegal
Drake Atkins/ Law Clerk
Suzie Hinzman/Deputy Dir. Finance & HR
Eric Harrison/Internal Affairs Auditor
Burdette Schoen/Accountant
Debbie Jacobsen/Accountant
Laurie Casados/Budget & Finance Mgr.
Doug Thomas/Grant Auditor
Deb Collins/Communications & Media Mgr.
James Hood/ Technology Manager
Maria Rowan/Human Resources Manager
Erica Garcia/Human Resources Generalist
Deborah Bertram/Receptionist/Admin. Sec.

Telecommunications /NUSF Department

Cullen Robbins/Director
Carrie Gans/Assistant Director
Brett Bode /Program Manager
Brand Zierott/Administrative Assistant
Susan Horn/Administrative Assistant
Cheryl Elton/Consumer Affairs Advocate
Victor Kapustin/Economic & Data Analyst
Dohee Kim/GIS Specialist
Andrea Grell/NTAP Manager
Justin Williamson/Policy Analyst
Leslie Horwart /Policy Analyst
Camelia Rogers/Grant Policy Analyst

State 911 Department

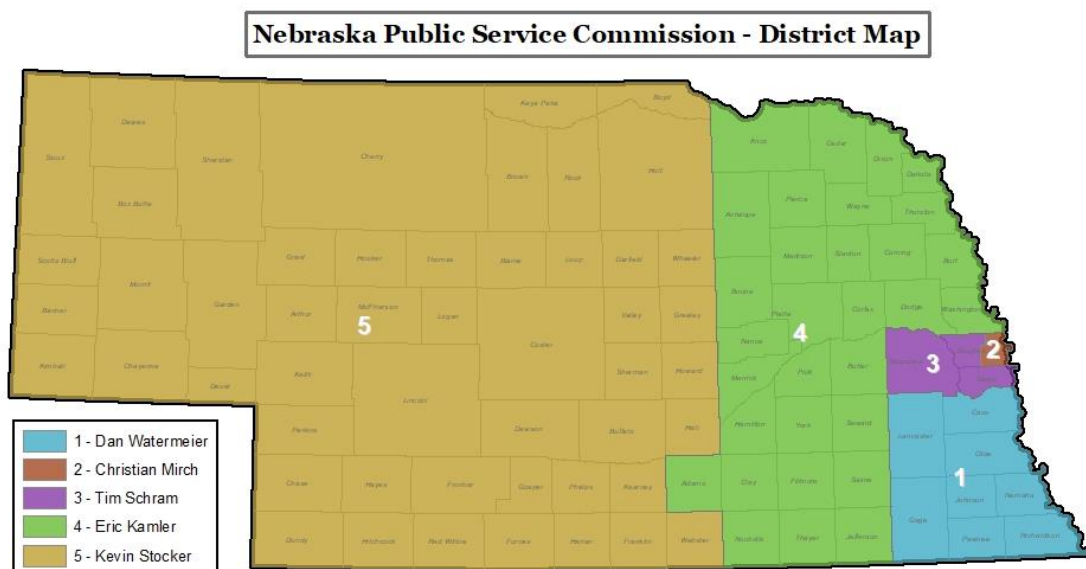
David Sankey/State 911 Director
James Almond/Field Coordinator
Tina Bartlett/Administrative Coordinator
Christian Nielsen/GIS Lead
Kathy Shepard/Accountant I
Jacki Synhorst/Administrative Assistant

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The Nebraska Public Service Commission (Commission) is a constitutionally created executive body established under Article IV, Section 20 of the Nebraska Constitution. The Commission is comprised of five elected Commissioners serving six-year terms. The Commission was initially created by the Legislature in 1885 to regulate railroads but was not firmly established until the passage of a constitutional amendment in 1906 creating a three-member elected Railway Commission. Membership was increased to five Commissioners in 1964 and the state was divided into five districts, each to elect a commissioner. The name was changed to the Public Service Commission by a general election vote in 1972.

Today the Commission regulates telecommunications carriers, natural gas jurisdictional utilities, railroads, household goods movers and passenger carriers, grain warehouses and dealers, construction of manufactured and modular homes and recreational vehicles, high voltage electric transmission lines, and private water company rates. The Commission also oversees and administers several statutorily created funds with specific legislative purposes and goals including the Nebraska Universal Service Fund, the 911 Service System Fund, and the Nebraska Telecommunications Relay System Fund.

The Commission is active on local, state, and national levels and contributes on all levels to determine policy regarding the future of communications and universal service. Many Commissioners, past and present, have served on boards, committees, and advisory groups to recommend and give insight on policy matters to both state and federal agencies and legislative bodies.





COMMISSIONERS:
ERIC KAMLER
CHRISTIAN MIRCH
TIM SCHRAM
KEVIN STOCKER
DAN WATERMEIER



September 30, 2024

Pursuant to Nebraska Rev. Stat. § 86-163, the Public Service Commission (the Commission) hereby files the 2024 annual report with the Clerk of the Legislature. The Commission continues to make significant progress toward connecting all Nebraskans to broadband and ensuring that 911 services continue to evolve to make emergency response as efficient as possible.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Commission utilizes several programs and processes to fulfill its regulatory obligations to ensure quality telecommunications services are available across all of Nebraska. Through these efforts, the Commission approved several boundary change requests from consumers, so that they could receive telecommunications services from providers in adjacent exchanges. The Nebraska Specialized Equipment Program (NSTEP), which provides specialized telecommunications equipment at no expense to qualifying deaf, hard-of-hearing, and/or speech-disabled citizens, also continues to experience high rates of participation. It is expected that additional citizens will now benefit from the program with the passage of LB 1031 passed during the 2024 Legislative session, which allows two people per household to receive the benefit and allows for more frequent reapplication to the program.

BROADBAND PROGRAMS

Significant efforts were made this past year to connect all Nebraskans to high-speed Internet. The Commission conducted a second grant cycle for the Capital Projects Funds, awarding the remaining \$31 million for broadband grants. The Commission also continues to administer the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program. \$19.7 million in grants were awarded through the 3rd grant cycle, and the 4th grant cycle was initiated in the spring of 2024.

NEBRASKA UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

The Nebraska Universal Service Fund continues to be an important mechanism for supporting broadband-capable voice networks. In 2024, the Commission opened a new docket to look at ways to keep the fund modern and to potentially provide support to maintain networks built through various broadband grant programs, including the programs the Commission administers (NBBP, CPF), but also potentially supporting areas and locations built to through other federal and state programs, like the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment program administered by the Broadband Office. The Commission continues to work collaboratively with the Broadband Office to further the goals of universal connectivity for Nebraska.

The Commission conducted its first grant cycle in the Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program, created through LB 1144 in the 2022 Legislative Session. The program seeks to propel Nebraska agricultural producers to lead the nation in precision agriculture connectivity, sustainability, traceability, and autonomy to accelerate rural economic development. The Commission awarded 11 grants totaling \$678,616. A second grant cycle will be conducted in FY 2024/25.

STATE 911

LB 993 (2018) authorized the Commission to begin implementation of the Next Generation 911 system in Nebraska, and in the last year much progress has been made. To date, 66 of 67 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) have migrated to the 911 Service System. With 66 PSAPs and two State Patrol Communications Centers connected to the system, 99% of Nebraska's population and over 99% of the state's geography is served by the Next Generation 911 System. The Commission expects the remaining PSAP to connect by the end of 2024. .

In the Next Generation 911 environment, citizens seeking emergency assistance will be able to contact 911 utilizing voice communications, text messages, photos, videos, and other digital media means. The identification of a caller's location and the routing of that call to the appropriate PSAP is greatly enhanced, ultimately improving the chances of receiving emergency assistance much faster and saving lives.

These are just a few of the highlights on what the Commission has accomplished over the past year. The annual report contains additional details on these programs, information about other achievements over the past year, and data and statistics that the Commission collects about the communications systems in place in Nebraska.

Sincerely,



Dan Watermeier
Chair – Nebraska Public Service Commission

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Regulatory Oversight

The Commission's Telecommunications/Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) Department is responsible for administering programs and enforcing rules and regulations that facilitate competition, maintain quality voice service, and ensure that all Nebraskans have access to quality telecommunications and information services at affordable and comparable rates. In addition to handling consumer complaints and certificating carriers to provide telecommunications services within the state, the department administers the NUSF as well as other grant programs described later in this report.

The Commission works within the confines of both national and state laws. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 identified priorities for universal service, including quality and reasonably priced services for all customers including those in rural, low-income, and high-cost regions, equitable and nondiscriminatory service, specific and predictable price structure, and access to service for schools, health care institutions, and libraries. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 further provided for competition in the local service market. The Commission continues to execute key provisions of the 1996 Telecommunications Act to further the goal of increased competition while maintaining quality and affordable service.

The regulatory authority of the Commission extends to certain type of carriers. Incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) serve delineated areas, or exchanges. They have carrier of last resort responsibilities, meaning they are required to provide service within their boundaries of their exchange if there is no other carrier providing service. The Commission also has designated companies as competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs) to provide service in areas previously served by monopoly companies. CLECs serve customers by either using the facilities of the existing local company for a fee, similar to leasing, or using their own facilities. CLECs foster competition by giving customers more than one choice of telecommunications provider in a local market. The Commission has authorized several CLECs to compete with the incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) for service in Nebraska.¹

The Commission also provides regulatory oversight to carriers that are divided into two categories: price cap companies and rate of return companies. A price cap company is an incumbent local exchange carrier that is regulated on the federal level under a price cap regime. Generally, under a price cap regime, limits are set on the prices that a provider can charge. In the context of telecommunications, there are limits on the prices that can be charged for basic telephone service. In Nebraska, the price cap carriers are large, publicly traded corporations that provide telecommunications service in multiple exchanges and cover a combination of rural and densely populated areas. Examples includes Windstream, CenturyLink, and Frontier. A rate of return company is an incumbent local exchange carrier that is regulated on the federal level under a rate of return regime. An entity regulated within a rate of return regime is allowed to cover costs and earn a fair return. The regulatory framework in place is intended to help prevent anti-competitive or monopolistic practices such as exploitation of customers by charging higher rates than would be possible in a competitive market. In Nebraska these generally are small or medium sized, privately-owned or cooperative companies providing telecommunications service in one or several exchanges, mostly in rural areas. Hamilton Telephone Company and Great Plains Communications are examples of rate of return companies that operate in Nebraska

¹ Go to <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> and select "Competitive Local Telephone Companies" under "Lists of Carriers."

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

Annually, the Commission receives and processes applications while fulfilling its regulatory responsibilities. The nature of these applications includes:

Authority withdrawal:	An application from a certificated entity to cease providing a certificated service.
Commission initiated:	No application: the Commission is opening the proceeding on its own behalf.
Eligible Telecommunication Carrier (ETC) certification:	Entities seeking to become eligible to receive universal service support.
Exchange boundary change:	The geographical area that a telephone company provides services, offering the same services and prices, is called an exchange. Nebraska law includes a process whereby a customer can seek a change in the boundary of telephone exchanges to allow the customer to receive service from an adjacent exchange, including both broadband and traditional telephone services. In the event the Commission grants a petition from a customer to change an exchange boundary, the Commission will update the boundaries and seek approval of the updated exchange boundaries from the affected companies.
Interconnection agreements/amendments:	To facilitate the transfer of voice traffic over the networks of more than one carrier, agreements are put in place to outline how, and for what cost, telephone traffic will be routed. They enter into an interconnection agreement by either negotiating the terms, adopting an approved agreement of two other carriers pursuant to section 252(i) of the 1996 Act, or through mediation or arbitration if negotiations fail to result in mutually acceptable agreement. Copies of all current approved agreements are available on the Commission's website. ²
Interexchange Carrier (IXC) certification:	Interexchange service is the access and transmission of communications between two or more local exchange areas, except for two-way switched communication between local exchanges that are grouped for extended area service. Carriers providing this service are required to be certificated by the Commission.
Loan:	An application by a certificated provider to the Commission to approve a debt financing arrangement.
Local Exchange Carrier (LEC) certification:	The Commission receives an application from a company that seeks to provide a certificated service.
Merger:	In the event that carriers merge into one entity, that activity is required to be registered with the Commission.
Name change:	All carriers are required to register name changes with the Commission.

² Go to <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> and select "Interconnection Information" under "Other."

Tariff:	An explanation of what each company provides and the rates at which they are provided; carriers are required to file these changes with the Commission. These are available on the Commission's website at https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/local-tariffs .
Trade name:	Certificated entities changing their name.
Transfer of control:	When the controlling interest of one company moves to another; typically, a purchase of a company by another.

A summary of those activities for FY 2023-2024 is below:

Category	No. of Applications	Category	No. of Applications
Authority withdrawal	4	LEC certification	5
Boundary change	25	Merger	1
Commission initiated	5	Name change	2
ETC certification	3	New communications provider	44
Interconnection	10	Tariff changes	71
Interconnection amendment	4	Trade name	3
Internet	3	Transfer of control	3
IXC Certification	6	Other	1
Loan	5	Directory waiver	2
ETC Relinquishment	1	Pay Station waiver	3
Water rate	1	TRS Complaint	1

Docket	Carrier	Authority Type	Date Entered
C-5557	Impact Telecom, LLC	IXC	3/5/2024
C-5560	Barr Tell USA, Inc.	CLEC/IXC	3/5/2024
C-5539	Five Nines Technology Group, LLC	IXC	1/9/2024
C-5542	Network Innovations, LLC, d/b/a Nitel	IXC	1/9/2024
C-5536	Telecom Management, Inc., d/b/a Pioneer Telephone	IXC Withdrawal	12/5/2023
C-5531	Quick Current-Nebraska LLC	CLEC/IXC	11/28/2023
C-5528	BullsEye Telecom, Inc.	CLEC/IXC Withdrawal	10/3/2023
C-5525	Metro Fibernet, LLC	CLEC/IXC	9/12/2023
C-5516	Skybeam, LLC	IXC	8/15/2023
C-5517	Hamilton NG911, Inc.	CLEC Withdrawal	8/1/2023
C-5509	Sirius Computer Solutions, LLC	CLEC	7/11/2023

Exchange Boundary Change Requests FY 2023-2024		
Docket	Description	Date Filed
C-5522	Wynette Reed, Marquette, service from the Marquette Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company	07/5/2023
C-5524	Jason and Shannon Bauer, Hoskins, service from the Hoskins Exchange of Pierce Telephone Company, Inc.	07/17/2023
C-5526	Natashia Moser, Hartington, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	08/9/2023
C-5527	Steve Wieseler, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	08/21/2023
C-5530	Application of Shelly Berck, Marquette, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Marquette Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	09/18/2023
C-5533	Application of Jason and Sheila Schneider and Jared Bunting, Aurora, and Dale Haseloh, Gina Bowden, Delores Kauk, and LaVonne Taylor, Harvard, each seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Stockham Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	09/22/2023
C-5535	Application of Larry Cooper, Polk, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Hordville Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	09/29/2023
C-5551	Application of Marcus and Donna Potts, Fordyce, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	12/18/2023
C-5556	Application of Michael Jones, Doniphan, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Doniphan exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	01/09/2024
C-5566	Application of Mason Buschelman, Fordyce, seeking authority to receive telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	03/11/2024
C-5570	Application of Turtle Beach Lake Association, Marquette, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Hordville Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	03/25/2024
C-5573	Application of Pam Tramp, Sue Tramp, Kelsey Tramp, and Pete Mueller, Crofton, each seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	04/05/2024

Exchange Boundary Change Requests FY 2023-2024		
Docket	Description	Date Filed
C-5574	Application of Michael Weeder, Osmond, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Pierce Exchange of the Pierce Telephone Company, Inc.	04/10/2024
C-5578	Application of Ron Wieseler, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	04/22/2024
C-5579	Application of Roger Bonertz, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	04/22/2024
C-5580	Application of Richard Bruening, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	04/22/2024
C-5585	Application of Steve & Julie Herbig, Marquette, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Marquette Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	05/10/2024
C-5586	Application of Jeff Baldrige, Randy Allen, and Dean Soell, North Platte, each seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hershey Exchange of Hershey Cooperative Telephone Company.	05/13/2024
C-5587	Application of Randy Bruening, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	05/20/2024
C-5588	Application of Jon & Janet Wiechelman, Crofton, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	05/20/2024
C-5591	Application of Rick Goertzen, Sara Campa, Larry Brown, Alvin Campbell, Sara Sutherland, Milvern and Betty Noffke, Kevan and Laura Reeson, William Kuehner, Morgan Clarke, and James and Barbara Holtgrewe, Marquette, each seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Hordville Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	06/06/2024
C-5593	Application of Roger Albin, Crofton, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	05/28/2024
C-5594	Application of Claudette Wiepen, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications service from the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	05/30/2024
C-5597	Application of EMR Ventures LLC, St. Helena, seeking authority to receive telecommunications service from	06/24/2024

Exchange Boundary Change Requests FY 2023-2024		
Docket	Description	Date Filed
	the Hartington Exchange of Hartington Telecommunications Co., Inc.	
C-5598	Application of Isaac Samuelson, Polk, seeking authority to receive advanced telecommunications capability service from the Hordville Exchange of the Hamilton Telephone Company.	06/28/2024

Telecommunications Relay Service

The Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) was created by Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). TRS provides a platform for a person who has a hearing or speech disability to communicate with voice telephone users through a relay provider and a Communications Assistant (CA). This includes services that enable two-way communication between an individual who uses a text telephone (TTY or TT) or other non-voice terminal device and an individual who does not have such a device. CAs transmit or relay written communication from a text telephone or other non-voice terminal device to a person using a standard telephone. The person using the standard telephone speaks to the CA who transmits the message to the hearing-impaired individual.

TRS in Nebraska is funded through a monthly surcharge on all telephone numbers or functional equivalent, including wireless and VoIP lines. The surcharge for the 2023/24 fiscal year was \$.03. Starting July 1, 2024, the surcharge is assessed at \$0.05. The change in surcharge was due to an anticipated increase in participation as a result of statutory changes from LB 1031 passed during the 2024 Legislative session that impacted the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP). Additional information about that change is included in the Nebraska Specialized Equipment Program section of this chapter.

Prepaid wireless users are assessed a surcharge as well (for TRS, NUSF, and E911), where the surcharge is collected directly from the consumer by the retailer at the point-of-sale. The amount of the surcharge collected per retail transaction is based on an annual determination by the Nebraska Department of Revenue utilizing a formula of the amount of wireless prepaid surcharges established by finding the sum of the following:

- The percentage obtained by dividing the current annual Wireless E911 Surcharge by 50; and
- The percentage obtained by dividing the amount of the Nebraska TRS Fund Surcharge by 50.
- The percentage obtained by multiplying (i) the Nebraska Telecommunications Universal Service Fund surcharge percentage rate set by the Public Service Commission by (ii) one minus the Federal Communications Commission safe harbor percentage for determining the interstate portion of a fixed monthly wireless surcharge.

Amounts collected are remitted by retailers to the Department of Revenue. The Department of Revenue then remits the collected amounts, less administrative costs not to exceed 2%, to the State Treasurer for credit to the 911 Service System Fund, TRS Fund, and NUSF. For fiscal year 2023-24, total prepaid wireless remittances received for the TRS fund were \$47,213 compared to \$46,383 for fiscal year 2022-23.

NEBRASKA SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT PROGRAM

In 1995, the Legislature created the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP), which enables qualifying deaf, hard-of-hearing and/or speech-disabled citizens to obtain specialized telecommunications equipment at no expense, subject to certain program restrictions. Funded by the TRS Surcharge, expensive telecommunications equipment, such as mobile wireless devices, text telephones, amplifiers, amplified telephones, signaling devices and speech-generating devices have been made available to deaf, hard-of-hearing and/or speech-disabled consumers.

Changes to program eligibility were made by the Legislature through LB 1031 passed during the 2024 Legislative session, now enshrined in Nebraska Revised Statute § 86-314. The new law allows two persons per household to receive the benefit (the prior statute limited it to one per household), and eligible parties can now reapply every three years (down from every five years). The Commission expects these changes to increase participation in the program.

Fiscal year 2023-24 saw a slight increase in participation and a large increase in expenditures over 2022-23. For fiscal year 2022-23, \$553,722 was expended by NSTEP and provided equipment to 655 households compared to \$933,327 serving 665 households for fiscal year 2023-24.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICE STATISTICS AND TABLE

For fiscal year 2023-24, intrastate minutes of use (conversation-basis) for traditional TRS (including Speech to Speech) increased 10.90% compared to fiscal year 2022-23. For fiscal year 2022-23 minutes of use increased 19.10% compared to fiscal year 2021-22. We have seen significant reductions in traditional relay minutes since 2004 even though the last two fiscal years showed minor increases in minutes. The declines in traditional relay minutes are a result of increased popularity of smartphones and other text-based capable devices, as well as Video Relay Service (VRS), Internet-Protocol (IP) services and Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone services (IP CTS). For fiscal years 2023-24 and 2022-23, the landline-based Captioned Telephone service experienced declines of 56.34% and 28.03% respectively compared to previous years.

The following table displays selected historical statistics that reflect the operation of the Nebraska Relay System and NSTEP. The Commission went to a conversation-based rate for traditional relay beginning in July 2019. Note, for presentation purposes, prepaid wireless receipts are included in the surcharge revenue totals. For questions or other inquiries regarding the data provided, please contact the Communications Department of the Commission.

Telecommunications Relay Service
Selected Historical Statistics – Conversation Minutes for Traditional Relay and Captioned Telephone (CapTel)

Data Period	Avg. Call Length (completed, in mins.)	Combined Traditional & STS Relay			Avg. Call Length (answered in mins.)	Captioned Telephone Service			Monthly Activity Cost				Surcharge Rate - \$0.03/Line		
		Total Calls Completed	Total Mins. of Use (conversation)	Intrastate Mins. of Use (conversation)		Total Calls (answered)	Total Mins. of Use (conversation)	Intrastate Mins. of Use (conversation)	TRS Prg. Trad'l	TRS Prg. CapTel	Total TRS Prg.	Total NSTEP (equip. expense)	Surcharge (non-prepaid) Remitted	Prepaid Surcharge Remitted	Total Surcharge Remitted
Jan-23	6.05	153	925.80	650.30	3.67	333	1,222	842	\$2,386	\$1,903	\$4,289	\$4,781	\$60,044	\$4,473	\$64,517
Feb-23	5.29	129	681.80	464.10	4.37	339	1,482	1,020	\$1,703	\$2,304	\$4,008	\$11,533	\$59,101	\$52	\$59,153
Mar-23	7.93	114	903.90	728.80	4.08	398	1,622	954	\$2,675	\$2,156	\$4,830	\$36,288	\$62,058	\$3,995	\$66,053
Apr-23	5.31	98	520.80	389.40	2.79	394	1,100	780	\$1,429	\$1,762	\$3,191	\$0	\$60,149	\$3,810	\$63,958
May-23	6.10	163	995.10	746.30	2.70	400	1,082	753	\$2,739	\$1,702	\$4,441	\$29,096	\$60,806	\$4,332	\$65,137
Jun-23	5.32	262	1,393.00	1,096.40	3.82	425	1,623	1,038	\$4,024	\$2,346	\$6,370	\$117,776	\$60,844	\$3,963	\$64,807
Jul-23	5.41	99	535.50	435.90	2.51	416	1,042	854	\$1,600	\$1,929	\$3,529	\$141,410	\$60,893	\$4,112	\$65,004
Aug-23	5.18	197	1,019.90	803.80	2.34	344	804	501	\$2,950	\$1,132	\$4,082	\$135,592	\$60,724	\$4,252	\$64,976
Sep-23	5.59	183	1,022.40	609.30	3.41	235	802	603	\$2,236	\$1,363	\$3,599	\$245,449	\$61,101	\$4,043	\$65,144
Oct-23	6.00	228	1,368.60	1,070.40	3.05	423	1,289	1,036	\$3,928	\$2,342	\$6,270	\$11,053	\$61,329	\$4,069	\$65,398
Nov-23	5.84	150	875.50	517.90	3.57	276	985	777	\$1,901	\$1,755	\$3,656	\$14,995	\$59,757	\$4,066	\$63,823
Dec-23	3.93	189	742.20	468.30	3.13	349	1,093	830	\$1,719	\$1,876	\$3,594	\$99,360	\$61,407	\$3,950	\$65,357
Jan-24	4.42	183	809.70	617.50	2.86	278	796	586	\$2,266	\$1,323	\$3,590	\$113,527	\$61,393	\$3,883	\$65,276
Feb-24	5.16	198	1,022.60	782.70	3.52	277	974	691	\$1,563	\$2,873	\$4,435	\$27,675	\$60,772	\$3,962	\$64,734
Mar-24	6.08	162	984.80	667.00	4.55	189	860	471	\$2,448	\$1,063	\$3,511	\$46,970	\$61,634	\$3,770	\$65,404
Apr-24	6.30	217	1,367.00	939.00	2.92	141	412	161	\$3,446	\$363	\$3,809	\$0	\$60,893	\$3,600	\$64,493
May-24	7.55	209	1,577.50	918.50	2.11	150	316	161	\$3,371	\$364	\$3,735	\$77,131	\$61,545	\$3,833	\$65,378
Jun-24	6.84	111	759.00	468.80	3.15	133	419	205	\$1,721	\$464	\$2,185	\$20,165	\$61,001	\$3,674	\$64,676

Telecommunications Information and Data

LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIERS

This section of the report provides information on local exchange carriers currently certificated to provide service in Nebraska, the business and residential local rates charged by Nebraska carriers, and a listing of communities and the local carriers offering service in those communities.

The financial information submitted to the Commission regarding local exchange company earnings is not included in this report. Competition has been introduced into portions of this market and company-specific data may reveal competitively sensitive information. Thus, the annual reports filed by the local exchange companies remain available at the Commission for use by Commissioners and Commission staff. Portions of the reports that are not proprietary are available for public inspection.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 provided for competition in the local exchange service market. The Commission has authorized several competitive local exchange carriers (CLEC) to compete with the incumbent local companies (ILEC) in Nebraska. The following table provides details on the local exchange market in Nebraska for the past two years.

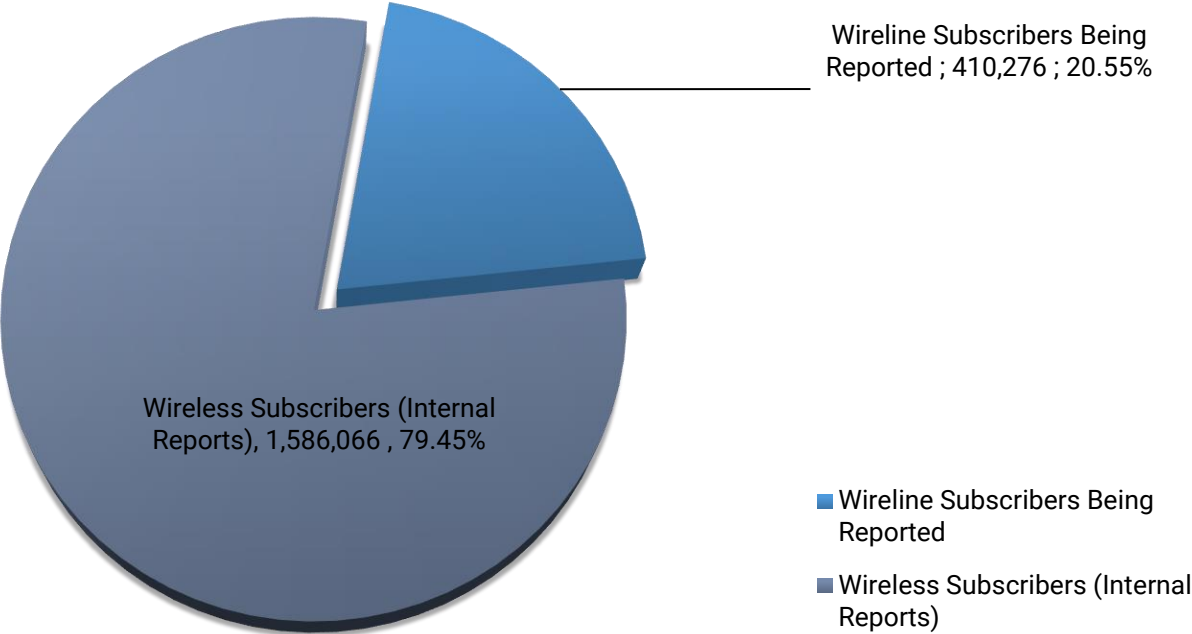
	2022	2023	Change
Total Access Lines Served in the State	410,276	351,127	(14.4%)
Total Access Lines Served by ILECs	166,606	144,225	(13.4%)
Total Access Lines Served by CLECs	171,331	157,500	(8.0%)
Percentage of Total Access Lines Served by CLECs	41.8%	44.9%	3.1%
Total Access Lines Served by a VoIP Providers	72,339	49,402	(31.7%)

As of July 1, 2024, 44 incumbent local exchange carriers (including cooperative telephone companies) and 104 competitive local exchange carriers have been certificated by the Commission to operate in Nebraska. Cox Nebraska Telcom, LLC is the largest carrier with 94,083 access lines. A listing of Nebraska carriers, the number of residential lines and business lines served by each carrier, and the current residential and business rates charged by those companies can be found in Appendix A of this report. The rates listed are for basic dial-tone services as of July 1, 2024, and exclude subscriber line charges, extended area serves rates, and other optional charges.

NEBRASKA MARKET DISTRIBUTION BY TECHNOLOGY

Nebraska, as with the entire U.S., continues to see significant changes in the number of consumers that opt to relinquish their landline telephone and exclusively use a wireless product or other internet product like Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). The table below shows the number of subscribers in Nebraska using wireline and wireless technology. Some consumers may utilize both technologies and therefore included in both categories.

2024 Nebraska Market Distribution By Wireless and Wireline Technology



Notes to chart: Some local exchange carriers offer services via VoIP facilities/arrangements.

EXPLANATION OF CHARGES ON TELEPHONE BILLS

Nebraska telephone service customers are assessed different charges on their telephone bills. A summary of those charges follows:

911 Service Surcharge:	A charge assessed by and remitted to a city or county to fund the operation of public safety answering points (PSAP) that receive 911 emergency calls. This charge ranges from \$.50 to \$1.00 per month per telephone number.
Basic Residential Service:	The monthly rate charged by companies to provide telecommunications service to a private residence, including single and multifamily dwellings, within the local calling area.
City Occupation or Franchise Tax:	A tax assessed on telephone companies by a city for the right to do business in the community. Telephone companies are allowed to recover the amount paid in occupation or franchise taxes directly on customer bills. Not every city imposes occupation or franchise taxes, and they vary by city.
City Sales Tax:	A tax assessed by a city to fund general municipal obligations. Not every city assesses a city sales tax, and they vary by city.
Extended Area Service:	A monthly flat fee charged by telecommunications companies that allows users to place and receive an unlimited number of calls from nearby communities with no additional charges.
Federal Subscriber Line Charge:	A charge set by the FCC that customers pay to their local phone company to cover part of the cost of connecting customers to the telephone network. It is currently capped at \$6.50 per month for the first residential line and single business lines. The monthly charge varies by company.
Federal Tax (Excise Tax):	A 3% federal tax which funds general federal government operations.
Federal Universal Service:	All telecommunications service providers must contribute to the Federal Universal Service Fund based on a percentage of their interstate end-user revenues. The fund supports the following four programs: Lifeline, High-cost, Schools, Libraries, and Rural Health Care. The rate is recalculated by the FCC quarterly and is usually passed on to consumers and varies by company.
Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) Surcharge:	All telecommunications service providers must contribute to NUSF based on number of connections. Telephone providers then recover the cost from their customers in the form of a surcharge collected from each customer. The NUSF surcharge is currently \$1.75 per connection.

Number Portability Charge:	A charge set by the FCC to allow telephone companies to recover costs associated with allowing customers to retain their telephone number when changing from one telephone company to another.
State Sales Tax:	A tax assessed by the state on local and in-state long distance telecommunications charges that funds general state government obligations. The current tax rate is 5.5%.
Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Surcharge:	A charge set by the Commission to fund the operation of the statewide TRS system for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech impaired citizens. The TRS Surcharge also provides financial aid to eligible Nebraskans for the purchase of specialized telephone equipment necessary to use TRS. The TRS Surcharge is reviewed annually by the Commission and is currently \$.05 per month per telephone number or functional equivalent.
Wireless E911 Surcharge:	A charge assessed by the Commission to fund the implementation and operation of the State 911 Service System , which allows for the location and routing of 911 calls. Currently the charge is \$.70 per month on each telephone number in service, except in Douglas County where the rate is statutorily capped at \$.50

LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CARRIERS

The number of Interexchange Carriers (IXC), otherwise known as long distance companies certificated to operate in the State of Nebraska slightly decreased from the prior year. Currently, there are 172 companies authorized to provide long distance services in Nebraska. A listing of all long distance carriers certificated to provide services in the state can be found on the Commission's website at: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> (click on "Lists of Carriers" and select "Interexchange Carriers" from the list). Inclusion on the listing does not mean the company is offering service in Nebraska currently.

COMMUNICATIONS/INFORMATION PROVIDERS

The number of communication/information providers operating the State of Nebraska continues to grow. Currently, there are 399 companies providing wireless, VoIP, satellite, Internet, DSL, dark fiber, and/or paging in Nebraska. These services are not certificated by the Commission, but statute requires non-certificated communication providers to register with the Commission. A listing of these providers can be found on the Commission's website at: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> (click on "Lists of Carriers" and select "Communications Provider Registry" from the list). Inclusion on the listing does not mean the company is offering service in Nebraska currently.

OUTAGE REPORTS

Reports are required to be filed with the Commission by local exchange carriers when service outages are experienced that meet certain thresholds – details regarding reporting requirements can be found at

<https://psc.nebraska.gov/sites/psc.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Service%20Outage%20Reporting%20Requirements.pdf>. Outage reports must include the date and time of the outage, the geographic area affected, the cause of the outage, if known, and an estimate of the number of access lines affected. Within five days of resolving the trouble, a final report must be filed with the Commission showing the total number of trouble reports received from customers related to the outage and the corrective action taken.

2023-2024 Outage Report	
Primary Cause	Number of Outages
Cable Cut	28
Damaged Cable	5
Equipment	58
Other	25
Grand Total	116

COMPLAINTS

The Commission works to ensure Nebraskans are receiving quality telecommunications service by monitoring consumer complaints for indications of potential problems requiring further investigation. The Commission's staff offers assistance to consumers to identify the source of service problems and resolve service complaints. The Commission receives and helps remedy complaints for the communications services under its regulatory purview. Of the 551 complaints received during Fiscal Year 2023-2024 a total of \$45,638.20 was savings to the consumers in Nebraska. A summary of those complaints follows.

Wireline Companies						
	2022-2023			2023-2024		
	Complaints	Access Lines	% Total Lines	Complaints	Access Lines	% Total Lines
Windstream	47	64,379	15.7 %	65	55,327	15.7%
Century Link	118	46,886	10.7%	232	37,040	10.5%
NT&T	2	3,621	0.9%	6	2,937	0.9%
Cox	10	104,790	25.5%	8	94,083	26.8%
Frontier/Citizens	9	8,826	2.2%	19	7,210	2.2%
Great Plains	2	12,692	3.1%	4	11,570	3.3%
AT&T	0	5,880	1.4%	0	5,139	1.4%
Time Warner/Spectrum	6	59,619	14.5%	15	40,537	11.5%
Others	15	106,693	26.0%	29	97,075	27.7%
Total	209	410,276	100%	369	350,918	100%

While the Commission lacks statutory authority over wireless telecommunications service and billing, consumers do submit wireless complaints. Commission staff continues to review, process, and submit complaints, and is often successful at resolving these complaints.

Wireless Complaints						
Name of Carrier	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Complaints	%	Complaints	%	Complaints	%
AT&T	5	6.8	6	8.2	6	12.0
Consumer Cellular	0	0.0	3	4.2	0	0.0
Sprint	1	1.4	2	2.7	0	0.0
T-Mobile	10	13.7	6	8.2	6	12.0
TracFone Wireless	4	5.5	6	8.2	2	4.0
US Cellular	4	5.5	10	13.7	1	2.0
Verizon Wireless	45	61.6	28	38.4	24	48.0
Viaero Wireless	0	0.0	2	2.7	4	8.0
Virgin Mobile	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Others	4	5.5	10	13.7	7	14.0
Total	73	100.0	73	100.0	50	100.0

Additionally, consumers often submit complaints about other services that the Commission does not regulate, such as cable or satellite television. The following tables show the complaints received, categorized by service type for the last two years in the first table, in the second table by type of complaint for each service type, and in the third table by type of complaint for the last two years.

Historical Complaints by Carrier Type				
	2022-2023		2023-2024	
	Total	%	Total	%
Local Exchange Carriers	209	53.3	369	67.0
Wireless	73	18.6	50	9.1
Information Services	105	26.8	128	23.2
Cable TV	5	1.6	4	0.7
TOTAL	392	100.0	551	100.0

2023-2024 Complaint Type by Carrier Type				
	Wireline	Wireless	Information Services	Cable TV
Service	299	27	100	1
Billing	44	16	18	3
Customer Service	1	0	1	0
Directory	2	0	0	0
Auto Dialer	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	23	7	9	2
TOTAL	369	50	128	4

Historical Complaints by Type		
Types	2022-2023	2023-2024
Billing	72	81
Service	290	427
Customer Service	3	2
Directory	1	2
Auto Dialer	0	0
Miscellaneous	26	39
TOTAL	392	551

NSTEP complaints for this fiscal year were all tied to Verizon discount (coupon) codes not working for wireless device redemption. In each of these complaints the Verizon discount codes were not working in relation to Pre-paid accounts. The following chart summarizes complaints and inquiries received for NSTEP.

NSTEP Complaints and Inquiries FY 2023-2024		
Primary Category	Sub-Category	Count
Billing Complaints	Lump-Sum Charges on Account for Wireless Device	0
	Monthly Device Charges on Account for Wireless Devices	0
	Other Billing Related	0
Service Complaints	Service Cannot Be Created or Attached to Business Account	0
Service Inquiries	Request for Assistance - Other	0
Technical Complaints	Manufacturer Equipment/Device Inoperable	0
	Verizon Discount Code Not Working	3
Vendor Customer Service	Vendor Did Not Follow Policies/Procedures	0
TOTAL		3

NEBRASKA UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

Purpose of Fund

Defined in statute (Chapter 86, Section 324), the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) was created in 1997 when the Legislature passed LB 686, authorizing the Commission to create the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF). The NUSF was created in response to new provisions in the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 which embodied Congress's goal that consumers in all regions of the nation, including rural and high cost, should have access to telecommunications and information services at rates "reasonably comparable" to services and charges offered in urban areas. The goal of the NUSF, therefore, is to ensure that all Nebraskans have access to quality telecommunications and information services at affordable and comparable rates, in conjunction with federal universal service goals. This is accomplished through the provision of various programs that provide support to eligible telecommunications carriers operating in high-cost areas.

The Commission currently administers the following programs within the NUSF:

1. Broadband Program/Wireless Tower Fund: provides funding to construct mobile wireless towers in areas that lack coverage but would not otherwise be economically feasible. Docketed in NUSF-92
2. E-Rate Special Construction Program: provides funding toward the costs of construction for libraries and schools that are not fiber connected. Docketed in NUSF-117
3. High-Cost Program: makes telecommunications and information rates generally affordable and comparable across Nebraska. Docketed in NUSF-99, NUSF-108, and NUSF-131, among others.
4. Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program (NTAP): provides discounted rates to qualifying low-income Nebraskans (previously known as the Lifeline/Link-Up Program). Docketed in NUSF-2
5. Rural Telehealth Program: supports the provision of telecommunications services to Nebraska Health Care Providers. Docketed in NUSF-57

Fund Structure

FUNDING MECHANISM

Funding for the NUSF is collected via a surcharge on eligible telecommunications services. The Commission, by Order and after public hearing, has determined that the surcharge on residential and business services (wireline, mobile wireless, and VoIP) will be assessed on a per connection basis at \$1.75 per connection per month, where applicable, and at 6.95% of assessable revenues for all other services. The Commission reviews the level of the surcharge annually and makes a determination on the surcharges prior to the end of each fiscal year. Using this methodology, any residential device able to complete an intrastate voice call is assessed the per connection surcharge. Business services also moved to a per-connection surcharge on January 1, 2022. Interstate and Internet services are not subject to the NUSF surcharge. The Commission determines assessable services using FCC federal universal service definitions to reduce the amount of duplicate administrative work for telecommunications providers. Specific categories of services subject to the NUSF surcharge are:

- Local service, including connection charges, enhanced service, such as Caller ID, and Extended Area Services (EAS);
- Wireless services, including cellular, PCS, and paging;
- In-state long distance services, including prepaid calling card, operator-assisted, collect, calling card and private line; and
- Voice over the Internet Protocol (VoIP) service.

Prepaid wireless users are assessed a surcharge as well (for TRS, NUSF, and E911), where the surcharge is collected directly from the consumer by the retailer at the point-of-sale. The amount of the surcharge collected per retail transaction is based on an annual determination by the Nebraska Department of Revenue utilizing a formula of the amount of wireless prepaid surcharges established by finding the sum of the following:

- a) The percentage obtained by dividing the current annual Wireless E911 Surcharge by 50; and
- b) The percentage obtained by dividing the amount of the Nebraska TRS Fund Surcharge by 50.
- c) The percentage obtained by multiplying (i) the Nebraska Telecommunications Universal Service Fund surcharge percentage rate set by the Public Service Commission by (ii) one minus the Federal Communications Commission safe harbor percentage for determining the interstate portion of a fixed monthly wireless surcharge.

Amounts collected are remitted by retailers to the Department of Revenue. The Department of Revenue then remits the collected amounts, less administrative costs not to exceed 2%, to the State Treasurer for credit to the TRS Fund, 911 Service System Fund, and NUSF.

HISTORICAL REMITTANCES

The annual contributions and allocations from NUSF for the last eight years are summarized below. The growth of the fund in recent years is attributed to two factors: (1) change in contribution mechanism implemented in April 2019 designed to stabilize the fund by utilizing a per-connection surcharge on residential services and (2) a further change in the contribution mechanism in 2021 to apply a per-connection surcharge to business services.

Year	Remittances	Year	Remittances
2016	\$ 39,901,472	2021	\$ 41,690,957
2017	\$ 35,340,014	2022	\$ 47,122,607
2018	\$ 32,829,316	2023	\$ 50,783,802
2019	\$ 39,726,438	2024 (through June)	\$ 25,435,000
2020	\$ 42,621,136		

FUND BALANCE AND BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS

As of the end of June, 2024, the balance in the NUSF was approximately \$128 million. The size of the fund balance is largely due to accountability measures in place to make sure NUSF funding is utilized as intended. Starting in 2015, the Commission made changes in program policy for the High Cost program to provide support upon completion of projects, increasing the amount of allocated support held within the fund while projects are constructed. The majority of the fund balance is committed to High Cost programs totaling over \$111 million. Total commitments, including Telehealth and the E-Rate Special Construction program, are more than \$115,000,000. The remaining balance is utilized to cover expenses from the Nebraska Telephone Assistance (NTAP) Program and administrative costs.

Program	Committed Funding
NUSF-92 - Wireless Tower Program	\$ 14,542,000
NUSF-92 - BB Adoption/COVID	\$ 772,000
NUSF-99 - High Cost (Price Cap Carriers)	\$ 73,244,000

NUSF-108 - High Cost (Rate of Return Carriers)	\$ 15,347,000
NUSF-131 - Reverse Auction	\$ 7,916,000
NUSF-57 - Telehealth	\$ 2,575,313
NUSF-117 - E-Rate Special Construction	\$ 978,000
Total	\$ 115,374,313

NUSF ADVISORY BOARD

Pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute 86-327, the Commission convenes and appoints members to an advisory board to provide recommendations on the use of the fund. The advisory board meets annually at a public hearing held pursuant to the Open Meetings Act. Per By-Laws, members serve 3-year terms and can be reappointed at the Commission's discretion. Terms begin on January 1 of the first year and end on December 31 of the third year.

Advisory Board Membership Roster		
Public	Gene Hand, Chair 2516 Rokeby Road Lincoln, NE 68512	Appt: 4/2018 Reappt: 12/2020 Reappt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/26
K-12 Schools	Gary Needham Director of Technology, ESU 9 5807 Osbourne Drive W. Hastings, NE 68901	Appt: 4/2021 Term: 1/1/2022 – 12/31/2024
Libraries	Christa Porter, Vice Chair Nebraska Library Commission Suite #120, The Atrium Bldg. 1200 N Street Lincoln, NE 68508	Appt: 3/2016 Reappt: 4/2019 Reappt: 4/2022 Term: 1/1/2022 – 12/31/2024
Rural Health Care	Rod Triplett Prairie Health Ventures 575 Fallbrook Blvd., Suite #204 Lincoln, NE 68521	Appt: 9/1/2020 Reappt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/2026
Telecom Carriers	Andrew Vinton Mgr. Government & Regulatory/Legal Counsel Allo Communications 330 S. 21 st Street Lincoln, NE 68510	Appt: 4/2022 Term: 1/1/2022 – 12/31/2024
Telecom Carriers	Al Lubeck Public Policy Director CenturyLink 13116 West 128 th Street	Appt: 4/2020 Reappt: 4/2021 Reappt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/2026

Advisory Board Membership Roster		
	Overland Park, KS 66213	
Telecom Carriers	Tonya Mayer Mobius Communications PO Box 246 Hemingford, NE 69348	Appt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/2026
Public	Ben Backus 440 O Street Gering, NE 69341	Appt: 4/2018 Reappt: 12/2020 Reappt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/2026
Commission	Victor Kapustin Public Service Commission 1200 N Street, Suite #300 Lincoln, NE 68508	Appt: 12/2023 Term: 1/1/2024 – 12/31/2026

Programs

The Commission administers five separate programs within the NUSF, each of which is designed to achieve the goals of quality service at affordable, comparable rates across Nebraska. More information regarding each program, including robust program guidelines outlining application process, full eligibility criteria, grant-making process, reimbursement process, and reporting are found on each program's respective page on the Telecommunications landing page of the Commission's website: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications>.

BROADBAND PROGRAM/WIRELESS TOWER FUND

The Nebraska Broadband Grant Program (NEBP) was established to provide specific and targeted broadband support to unserved and underserved areas to close the broadband availability gap. NEBP grants are available to regulated wireline, wireless, and unregulated communications providers wishing to participate. Activities supported through this program are organized under docket NUSF-92 and generally delineated between wireline support (which has been limited in recent years), broadband adoption uses, and wireless projects that provide capital support for tower deployment in high-cost areas of the state (wireless tower fund).

Funding in the wireless tower fund is focused on high-cost areas that are least likely to provide sufficient operating revenues to support tower construction or the placement of a cell site without NUSF support. These areas were identified as areas that have less than 10 households per square mile. Funding recommendations are based on five factors:

- Location, household density, and households per square mile.
- Number of households served.
- Distance from nearest existing tower using same technology (CDMA or GSM);
- Average daily traffic of measured roadways within the proposed tower's footprint; and
- Amount of requested funds per household served.

Historically, NUSF Docket 92 has supported a variety of broadband-related programs, including broadband adoption efforts, such as providing broadband service to low-income households in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, support during this program year was almost exclusively directed toward the wireless tower fund. The Commission received approximately \$6 million in funding requests for the wireless tower fund in 2023. Towers approved in the 2023 grant cycle are shown in the chart on the next page.

Company	Exchange	Total Funded
US Cellular	Beaver Crossing	\$529,325
US Cellular	Beemer	\$599,325
US Cellular	Memphis	\$599,325
US Cellular	Monroe	\$527,225
US Cellular	Naponee	\$599,325
US Cellular	Nehawka	\$609,325
Total		\$3,463,850

LB 683, passed during the 2023 legislative session, requires the Commission to withhold NUSF support from any carrier that utilizes communications equipment or services developed by organizations listed on the Federal Communications Commission's covered list, which can be viewed at <https://www.fcc.gov/supplychain/coveredlist>. Viaero affirmed to the Commission that it does have equipment in their networks that are on the covered list. The Commission had approved funding in the amount of \$7.94 million for Viaero to build 15 towers in the cycles of the program prior to the signing of LB 683. As a result, the Commission will withhold support, including but not limited to the support listed for wireless tower construction, from Viaero until such a time as they can affirm that all prohibited equipment has been removed from their network.

E-RATE SPECIAL CONSTRUCTION

Nebraska's E-Rate Special Construction program is designed to maximize funding available through the federal E-Rate program and to incentivize new fiber special construction builds to connect E-Rate eligible entities where there is no existing fiber connection. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted rules in the federal E-Rate program that includes a matching program for special construction charges for high-speed broadband. The federal program will increase an applicant's discount rate for these charges up to an additional 10% on a dollar-to-dollar basis, not to exceed 100% of costs, if a state provides eligible entities with funding for special construction for broadband that meets the FCC's long-term connectivity targets. For the purposes of the E-Rate program, special construction charges are the upfront, non-recurring costs of deploying new fiber or upgrading facilities to E-Rate eligible entities. Special construction consists of three components: (1) Construction of network facilities; (2) Design and Engineering; and (3) Project management.

The Commission has allocated \$1 million from the NUSF for the E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program. The funding is spread over four one-year funding periods from 2021 to 2024. As a supplemental support mechanism, NUSF-117 support will enable entities to maximize federal E-Rate special construction program support by providing E-Rate matching support of up to 10% of the total eligible one-time special construction charges but does not include funding for recurring costs or ongoing NUSF support. As the NUSF-117 dollars are intended to leverage additional federal E-Rate discounts, eligibility for the Nebraska E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program largely mirrors the Federal E-Rate program. Any applicant for NUSF-117 E-Rate Special Construction Matching

Program support needs to avail itself of federal E-Rate support and go through the necessary steps in the FCC's E-Rate program. This process includes selecting a provider through a competitive bid process.

The Commission is currently evaluating ways to improve the state funded E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program and increase participation of public libraries, as there has been limited participation in the program in its first three years. The Commission has opened NUSF-117 Progression Order No. 1 to seek comment on ways the program can be improved and if it should be extended beyond its initial four-year scope.

The following table reflects the total investment for the E-Rate Special Construction program, as based on participation in the state NUSF-117 E-Rate Special Construction Matching program:

E-Rate Special Construction Total Investment Costs and Support						
Funding Year (by fiscal year)	Participating Entity Count*	Estimated Total Eligible Special Construction Costs	Estimated Federal Discount	State Special Construction Commitment	Estimated Federal Match to State Special Construction	Estimated Participating Entity Contribution
2021	7	\$118,566.80	\$91,253.44	\$11,856.68	\$11,856.68	\$3,600.00
2022	3	\$58,496.00	\$44,096.80	\$5,849.60	\$5,849.60	\$2,700.00
2023	4	\$43,035.58	\$27,953.35	\$4,303.56	\$4,303.56	\$6,475.11

*Only includes entities participating in the federal E-rate program that are also participating in the state E-Rate special construction matching program. This does not reflect all federal E-Rate participation for Nebraska entities, nor does it reflect other federal E-Rate discounts an entity may receive.

HIGH-COST PROGRAM

The High Cost program is the primary mechanism by which the Commission supports buildout and maintenance of rural networks. When initially implemented, the state program was focused on ensuring universal access to telephone service in the newly competitive market. Later, as broadband services emerged and rapidly expanded, both the state and federal programs began authorizing more funding towards broadband-capable networks. Over time, the Commission has modified its high-cost universal service program in response to policy decisions made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) resulting in changes to the federal universal service support mechanisms, and also in response to specific changes driven by the communications landscape in Nebraska. The Commission's high-cost support mechanism was last changed in its NUSF-99/NUSF-108 companion decisions to transition more support for specific broadband-capable infrastructure projects. Infrastructure projects supported by NUSF are required by statute to provide service capable of 100/100 Mbps minimum. In its NUSF-99 proceeding, the Commission focused on reforms for carriers categorized as "price cap" carriers. In its NUSF-108 proceeding, the Commission focused on reforming the high-cost mechanism for carriers categorized as "rate-of-return" (RoR) carriers. Price Cap and Rate of Return Carriers that serve in Nebraska are shown below.

Price Cap Carriers
Windstream Nebraska, Inc.
Citizens Telecommunications Company of Nebraska
United Telephone Company of the West
CenturyLink QC

Rate of Return Carriers		
Arapahoe Telephone Company	Glenwood Telephone Membership Corporation	Northeast Nebraska Telephone Company
Arlington Telephone Company	Great Plains Communications, Inc.	Pierce Telephone Company, Inc.
Benkelman Telephone Company, Inc.	Hamilton Telephone Company	Plainview Telephone Company, Inc.
Cambridge Telephone Company	Hartington Telecommunications Company, Inc.	Southeast Nebraska Communications, Inc.
Consolidated Telco, Inc.	Hartman Telephone Exchanges, Inc.	Stanton Telecom, Inc.
Consolidated Telephone Company	Hemingford Cooperative Telephone Company	Three River Telco
Consolidated Telecom, Inc.	Henderson Cooperative Telephone Co.	Wauneta Telephone Company
Cozad Telephone Company	Hershey Cooperative Telephone Company	Blair Telephone Company
Curtis Telephone Company	Hooper Telephone Company	Eastern Nebraska Telephone Company
Dalton Telephone Company, Inc.	Glenwood Network Services, Inc.	Rock County Telephone Company
Diller Telephone Company	K & M Telephone Company, Inc.	Sodtoun Communications, Inc.
Elsie Communications, Inc.	Nebraska Central Telephone Company	

The Commission utilizes the State Broadband Cost Model (SBCM) to approximate costs and determine allocations for RoR carriers. The SBCM models costs to serve the locations within each census block in the state, and the Commission analyzes each census block within a rate of return carrier's exchange(s) to determine the following:

- Is the block in an urban or rural area?
- Does the carrier itself provide broadband at 25/3 Mbps or greater?
- Does a competitive provider provide broadband at 25/3 Mbps or greater?

The determination of whether a block is rural or urban is based on household density, and census designation, utilizing information from the 2010 US Census. If a block has more than 20 households and greater than 42 households per square mile or is within an area designated as a city or village, it is classified as urban. Urban blocks are not eligible for support and are removed from the analysis for support.

Census blocks are placed into a carrier's territory based on company Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier boundaries, which the PSC maintains. FCC Form 477 data is used to determine whether service exists within a given census block. The most recent dataset available at the time of model development is used for the distribution methodology. In the context of the SBCM, if a wireline provider (utilizing cable, fiber, or DSL service) reports 25/3 Mbps down/up availability for a block, it is considered served with broadband.

The SBCM data provides estimates of CapEx (Capital Expenses) and OpEx (Operating expenses) needed to bring broadband to the locations within the block. Each block was placed into the following categories based on the listed factors:

1. Urban – not eligible for support.
2. Rural, no broadband available – no investment has been made to bring broadband service, so will only receive OpEx for maintaining the existing network, but Broadband Deployment Support (BDS) may be used in this block.
3. Rural, competitive provider provides broadband – Since an unsubsidized competitor already provides broadband to this location, no support will be provided.
4. Rural, only ILEC provides broadband – Since the ILEC has made the investment to bring broadband service to the locations in this census block, the carrier will receive both OpEx and CapEx to offset the investment that has already been made.

A fifth situation may also occur, where a RoR carrier has elected federal Alternative Connect America Cost Model (A-CAM) support, but the A-CAM support was capped at a level not sufficient to deploy broadband to a minimum 25/3 Mbps ("capped locations"). Effective January 1, 2022, the Commission provides limited BDS support to RoR carriers for projects involving construction of new broadband infrastructure scalable to 100/100 Mbps.

For blocks that do not have broadband available, either from the ILEC or a competitive carrier, the ILEC has funds allocated to them for broadband deployment (Broadband Deployment Support, or BDS). They may elect to use those funds to bring broadband to blocks that lack it currently. When they choose to do this that support will only be provided for eligible projects on a reimbursement basis as costs are incurred. Approved rate of return project areas can be viewed on the Nebraska Broadband website at: <http://broadband.nebraska.gov>

Allocations for companies are adjusted proportionally based on the overall support available for the program. The allocations for the 2022, 2023, and 2024 calendar years can be found on the Commission website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/high-cost-information> – click on the links with "NUSF High Cost Support Distribution" in the name.

Ongoing support allocations for individual companies are also subject to additional review to ensure NUSF-HCP support does not exceed levels required to recover reasonable costs, nor result in an excessive overall rate-of-return.

To facilitate this review, NETCs are required to annually submit investment, expense, and revenue data, to the Commission via the NUSF-EARN Form (EARN Form). Using agreed-upon-procedures, independent auditors certify EARN Form amounts to the financial statements of the NETC.

In the calendar year 2024, the Commission allocated a total of \$44.3 million to price cap and RoR carriers. Of that amount, \$21.7 million was dedicated to BDS, or broadband deployment support. The

remaining funding was allocated as ongoing support, to be used for the maintenance and operation of existing networks. Through the High Cost program, the Commission has administered funds that have brought broadband-capable service to over 11,000 households that lacked 25/3 Mbps service since 2019. More details about the areas served and project costs can be viewed on the PSC’s Nebraska Broadband Map at <https://broadbandmap.nebraska.gov>.

In 2024, the Commission initiated a proceeding to potentially make significant changes to the High Cost process. The docket, NUSF-139, is ongoing, and additional information can be found on the PSC website.

NEBRASKA RURAL TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

In January 2021, the Commission revised the Nebraska Rural Telehealth Program to mirror modifications made in the federal program. The Commission has allocated an annual amount of \$1.5 million to the Nebraska Rural Telehealth Program, which is designed to be a companion to the federal Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF), a subprogram of the Rural Health Care (RHC) program administered by the FCC. Nebraska’s telehealth program provides supplemental and secondary funding to health care providers or consortia receiving federal support through the HCF. Under the federal HCF, costs are paid at a rate of 65 percent of eligible costs with the remaining 35 percent to be contributed by the health care provider or consortium. The Commission will provide funding toward that portion remaining after federal funding and provide up to a maximum of 25 percent of total eligible costs, with the remaining 10 percent to be paid by the healthcare provider or consortium.

Since modifications were made to the Nebraska Rural Telehealth Program in 2021, participation has steadily increased, as described in the chart below. For the 2023 program year, the Commission received 441 applications totaling \$1.6 million in requested funds exceeding the \$1.5 million budgeted. The Commission plans to continue to explore ways in the next year to make sure that the program continues to meet the connectivity needs of health care providers serving rural Nebraska.

Three-Year Program History		
Year	No. of Applications	Amount
FY2021	146	\$415,579.19
FY2022	228	\$557,697.72
FY2023	441	\$1,602,036.18
FY2024	500	\$3,429,865.03

NEBRASKA TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program (NTAP) assists eligible low-income individuals (income at or below 135% of the federal poverty level) with obtaining and keeping telephone services by lowering monthly telephone service rates. Eligible subscribers receive a monthly discount of up to \$12.75 on their telephone bill, which consists of up to \$9.25 through the federal Lifeline program and \$3.50 in NUSF support for eligible voice or bundled service. NTAP assistance is available for a landline or wireless telephone. Only one subscriber per household unit can receive NTAP support and each subscriber may only receive support for one telephone line, either wireline or wireless.

To qualify for the NTAP, a member of the subscriber's household must participate in one of the following programs:

- Medicaid;
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- Federal Public Housing Assistance;
- Children's Health Insurance Programs; or
- Veterans Pension Benefit/Survivors Pension Benefit.

For households located on qualifying Tribal lands, federal support of up to \$34.25 per month is available, and up to a \$100 reduction for initial connection charges. Eligibility criteria for consumers living in tribal areas includes participation in the following programs:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance;
- Tribally administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families;
- Head Start (only those meeting its income qualifying standard); or
- National School Lunch Program free lunch program.

Verification for eligibility in both the federal and state programs is completed through the National Verifier, a platform managed by the Universal Services Administration Company (USAC).

Participation has declined in the last few years, mirroring declining participation in the federal program. Factors impacting this decline include the availability of other programs, like the Affordable Connectivity Program (which offers a \$30/month subsidy) that participants are taking advantage of, limited awareness of the program, and challenges for participants navigating the federal application process. Additionally, it is worth noting that not all providers participate in the Lifeline program.

The Commission budgets \$200,000 to support this program for each calendar year, with the following expenditures:

Three Year Program History		
Year	Amount Disbursed	Average No. of Participants per Month
2021	\$108,013.50	2572
2022	\$90,433.00	2153
2023	\$66,066.00	1573
2024 (through Aug)	\$27,296.50	975

BROADBAND PROGRAMS

The Commission has supported broadband-capable networks through the Nebraska Universal Service Fund since 2011 (See Chapter I). In 2021, the Nebraska Legislature granted the Commission the authority to conduct a broadband-specific grant program, the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program (NBBP), aimed at increasing access to high-speed Internet, or broadband, for Nebraskans across the state. Programs are focused on deploying broadband infrastructure in areas of the state that are considered unserved, meaning broadband speeds are below 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download (“down”) and three megabits per second upload (“up”) (stylized as 25/3 Mbps). Support can also be provided to underserved areas of the state, which are locations with service below 100/20 Mbps speeds, but above 25/3 Mbps. Projects funded by Commission-administered programs must provide broadband Internet service scalable to 100/100 Mbps.

The Commission’s application and evaluation processes ensure that funds are allocated to projects that will best meet the state’s priorities as identified in statute, primarily to connect Nebraskans to high-speed Internet. Complete program guidelines and lists of grant awardees for each broadband program can be found on the Commission’s website at:

<https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/nebraska-broadband-bridge-program-nbbpcapital-projects-fund-cpf>.

Additionally, the Commission continues to support a broadband map that provides a wide variety of information about broadband availability and performance throughout the entire state. In 2020, the Commission worked to re-design the broadband map, and in July 2020 launched a new version. The Commission maintains up-to-date information on the projects supported through NUSF, NBBP, and the federal Capital Projects Fund grant program, and all of this information is displayed on the broadband map. The broadband map is also set up to display information about federal broadband programs, including areas supported through the various federal universal service fund programs. The site can be found at: <https://broadbandmap.nebraska.gov>.

The Commission maintains a separate broadband map that is focused specifically on the broadband grant programs (Broadband Bridge and Capital Projects Fund). This map allows for more detailed and specific information about the grant program to be displayed. This map can be accessed at:

<https://gis.ne.gov/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9dc876af8ea541daa28d7dc82378e5ca>).

The Commission has a long history of collaborating with other State agencies to support the connectivity needs of Nebraskans through the state. The Commission looks forward to expanding this collaboration with the newly created state Broadband Office. Collaborative efforts will be discussed in greater detail below.

Broadband Bridge

Originally created during the 2021 Legislative Session through LB 388 and now found in Neb. Rev. Stat. starting in §§ 86-1301, the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program (NBBP) was created to facilitate and fund the deployment of broadband networks in unserved and underserved areas of Nebraska. Through the program, the Commission has the authority to grant awards to assist applicants with eligible infrastructure installation costs for qualifying projects. Qualifying projects must provide broadband Internet service scalable to 100 megabits per second download and 100 megabits per second upload, or greater (100Mbps/100 Mbps).

Applications are assigned to priority tiers based on whether the project will provide service to unserved or underserved locations. Once applications are assigned to tiers, they are scored according to a series of criteria that assess financial capability, legal capability, technical capability,

whether rates are comparable, match source, match percentage, location-density, whether the applicant is an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC), whether a digital inclusion plan is included, and whether the applicant is participating in a public private partnership as part of the project. Points are assigned in each category as appropriate.

A challenge process was put in place in the program to protect an area from being overbuilt if another carrier is already providing service or is in the process of constructing service to an application area. Challengers must provide evidence to support their claim that service is already available or that they are in the process of building out infrastructure capable of serving the area they are challenging.

Beginning in fiscal year 2021-22, the Legislature appropriated \$20 million annually to NBBP to be distributed as grants and to pay for associated administrative costs. The following table describes how the NBBP funds have been awarded since the program's inception:

Award Summary	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total number of applications received	76	115	51	27
Total number of applicants	23	29	19	7
Total number of applications approved	61	37	22	TBA
Total unserved location counts for approved projects	1,765	2,178	1,488	TBA
Total underserved location counts for approved projects	10,875	260	342	TBA
Total location counts for approved projects	12,640	2,438	1,830	TBA
Total amount of grant funding available*	\$19,732,318	\$20,370,448	\$19,795,788	\$19,732,318
Total amount of grant funding requested	\$30,085,292	\$69,396,132	\$46,059,230	\$30,168,885
Total amount of grant funding approved	\$19,217,657	\$20,351,778	\$19,795,788	TBA

*This amount represents the \$20 million annual amount set forth by Nebraska Rev. Stat. § 86-1303, less administrative costs. Unawarded grant amounts are made available in the following funding year, when possible. Unencumbered funds cannot be carried across bienniums.

NBBP projects must be completed within 18 months after the award is made, though applicants can request extensions. Following deployment of the completed network, awardees are required to submit speed test information to the Commission as a condition of receiving final payment for the project. Speed tests reflect actual download and upload speed capabilities of the network during peak times of usage, using a random sample of subscriber locations. The number of locations required to be tested is depended upon the number of locations within the project area:

- 50 or fewer locations: 5 test locations;
- 51-500 location: 10% of the total number of locations as test locations; and
- Over 500: 50 test locations.

For the 2024 program year, applications were due in July. The Commission received 27 requests

from 7 applicants requesting \$30,168,884.90 in grant support to provide service to 1,177 unserved and 745 underserved locations. After a thorough evaluation of applications and challenge process, awardees will be announced in January 2025.

Capital Projects Fund

Under Section 604 of the Social Security Act, as added by Section 9901 of American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury established the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF). The CPF addresses the following priorities:

1. Broadband infrastructure deployment designed to directly enable work, education, and healthcare monitoring;
2. Critical needs that resulted from or were made apparent or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency; and
3. Critical needs of the community to be served by the deployment.

Nebraska was awarded \$128,740,178 for the fulfillment of the goals established by the CPF, which includes administrative costs. Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 81-12,245, in accordance with the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Act, Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 86-1301 – 1312, and in cooperation with the Department of Economic Development, the Commission used the grant framework established under the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program to determine funding eligibility. The Nebraska Legislature determined that funding through the CPF would be subdivided amongst the 3 US Congressional Districts in Nebraska. The total funding amount available for use towards broadband infrastructure deployment is as follows:

1. Congressional District 1: No less than \$40,000,000 for eligible projects.
2. Congressional District 3: No less than \$40,000,000 for eligible projects within cities of the second class and villages.

In Congressional District 2, it was determined that no more than \$35,000,000 would be designated for the improvement of multipurpose community facilities. It was also determined that this funding would be administered directly by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in a separate process.

Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 86-1301 – 1312 empowered the Commission with the authority to grant awards to assist applicants with eligible infrastructure installation costs for qualifying projects. Consistent with Broadband Bridge and NUSF, qualified projects must provide broadband Internet service scalable to one hundred megabits per second for downloading and one hundred megabits per second for uploading, or greater (100/100 Mbps).

On August 30, 2022, the U.S. Department of Treasury authorized \$87.7 million of the CPF funding to proceed with the broadband deployment in Nebraska Congressional Districts 1 & 3. The Commission initiated the first grant cycle for CPF in January 2023. The Commission received 130 applications between both Congressional District 1 and Congressional District 3. The Commission did not fund projects that were successfully challenged by another provider or that did not adequately demonstrate financial, legal, or technical capability; address digital inclusion; or demonstrate rate comparability. Additional points that determined funding were awarded for a speed additive, source and amount of matching funds, low location densities, and projects submitted as a private-public partnership.

Award Summary	Congressional District 1	Congressional District 3	Congressional District 3 - 2024
Total number of applications received	65	65	60
Total number of applicants	13	14	13
Total number of applications approved	27	38	28
Total unserved location counts for approved projects	627	173	1,642
Total underserved location counts for approved projects	2,387	3,562	1,571
Total location counts for approved projects	3,014	3,735	3,213
Total amount of grant funding approved	\$40,311,361.47	\$21,033,925.62	\$30,921,432.88

While all funds for Congressional District 1 were awarded, there were still funds remaining for Congressional District 3. The Commission opened an additional round of funding for Congressional District 3, with applications due in January 2024 and awards made in June 2024. The Commission received 60 applications and approved 28. All remaining funds were awarded through the 2024 grant cycle.

Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program

In 2023, the Commission initiated a new grant program to fulfill the requirements of the Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Act, outlined in Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 86-1401-1406. The purposes of the program are to:

- Propel Nebraska agricultural producers to lead the nation in precision agriculture connectivity, sustainability, traceability, and autonomy to accelerate rural economic development
- Provide high-speed Internet service to farm sites as defined in section 77-1359 in unserved areas of the state as defined in section 86-1302

The program provides funding for the purposes of supporting precision agriculture in two subprograms, Connectivity and Devices and Technology. Connectivity grants support the building of 100/20 Mbps wireless connectivity to on-farm structures and devices. Devices and Technology grants support the acquisition of precision agriculture tools such as on-farm traceability solutions, water and soil monitoring, and autonomous machinery. Grants are distributed with 90% of the grant being issued at the time of award, and 10% of the grant issued upon successful completion of the project.

Approximately \$1 million per fiscal year is available through the grant program. The Commission conducted the first cycle of the program during the 2023-24 fiscal year, with awards issued in April, 2024. The Commission awarded 3 grants totaling \$391,280 in the Connectivity subprogram, and eight applications totaling \$287,336 in the Devices and Technology subprogram. Additional information about the awards can be found on the Commission website:

(<https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/2023-2024-precision-agriculture-infrastructure-grant-program-c-5529>).

The Commission initiated the process for a second grant cycle to run in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Broadband Office Collaboration

The Commission has a long history of coordination and collaboration with other agencies on efforts to increase broadband infrastructure and adoption across the state.

In 2010, the Commission helped lead a collaborative effort aimed at mapping broadband, identifying broadband needs, and developing an initial broadband plan. The group consisted of representatives from the Commission, the University of Nebraska, the Office of the CIO/Nebraska Information Technology Commission (OCIO/NITC), AIM, and Nebraska Extension. The broadband map developed through this process was a precursor to the nationwide broadband map developed later by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) through the FCC Form 477 broadband deployment mapping process.

The Commission has been an active participant in the Rural Broadband Task Force since its inception and has a track record of collaborating with staff of the Office of the CIO/Nebraska Information Technology Commission (OCIO/NITC) in support of these efforts. The Task Force included Commissioner Dan Watermeier, Senators Bruce Bostelman and Mike Moser, former OCIO Ed Toner, and members from the agricultural, educational, health care, economic development, and telecommunications industries. Former Commissioner Mary Ridder was one of the founding Task Force members. The Commission also provides staff support to the group.

The Nebraska Broadband Office is statutorily required to direct the coordination among state agencies, boards, and commissions on policy matters affecting use of federal or state funding for broadband infrastructure deployment, operation, and maintenance. Prior to the creation of the Broadband Office by executive order in January 2023, the Commission was collaborating with other agencies on the use of federal funds to support broadband deployment and will continue to do so with the now codified Broadband Office.

In February 2022, Governor Ricketts identified an Interim Broadband Coordinator within the Budget Office to organize and facilitate collaboration around broadband deployment activities across various state agencies. The following August, the first Broadband Working Group meeting arose out of this coordination, which launched the Connect Nebraska Working Group (CNEW), an interagency collaboration comprised of members from the Budget Office, Governor's Policy and Research Office, the OCIO/NITC, and the Public Service Commission. CNEW was charged with coordinating Nebraska's federally funded broadband programs. Many Commission staff regularly participated in the working group, bringing their financial, legal, and policy expertise.

Within the same timeframe, the Interim Broadband Coordinator began convening regular stakeholder meetings, approximately monthly, which both Commissioners and Commission staff attend. During these meetings, Commission staff shared updates with the broader group on broadband programs administered by the Commission, mapping efforts, and, prior to its transition to the Broadband Office, the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program. In May 2023, the Broadband Office began facilitating small working groups to work on various aspects of the Nebraska Strategic Broadband Plan (a separate effort from the Five-Year Action Plan required for the BEAD program) through this stakeholder group. Commission staff participated in four of the five work groups with following focus points:

- Broadband deployment;
- Digital opportunities and inclusion;
- Collaboration and engagement; and
- Ongoing network maintenance and sustainability.

BROADBAND EQUITY ACCESS AND DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM

In June 2022, Governor Ricketts submitted a Letter of Intent to the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) declaring Nebraska's plan to participate in the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program and identifying the Commission as the administering entity for the grant funds. In August 2022, the Commission submitted the initial detailed planning fund budget and project summary to the NTIA and began engaging in some planning activities knowing that activity would need to be limited until the initial planning award was received and the Commission could draw down funds for eligible activities. The Commission received the initial planning award in mid-November 2022.

In January 2023, Governor Pillen initiated the creation of a broadband office via Executive Order. During the 2023 Legislative Session, LB LB683 was passed, formally creating the Broadband Office. The office was created in part to administer federal BEAD funds.

In June 2023, the Nebraska Broadband Office (NBO) assumed responsibility for administering the BEAD program. Patrick Haggerty was appointed by Governor Pillen to be the state's first broadband director. It is expected that BEAD funding will be awarded in late 2024 or early 2025 for broadband deployment. NBO activities can be followed via their website: <https://broadband.nebraska.gov/>.

STATE 911

In 2016, the Nebraska Legislature adopted LB 938. This bill created the 911 Service System Act. The act designated the Commission the statewide authority to plan, implement, coordinate, manage, maintain, and provide funding assistance for a statewide 911 System, created the State 911 Department, and required that an implementation plan be developed to transition Nebraska's aging 911 system to a statewide Next Generation 911 (NG911) System.

The NG911 Master Plan was adopted by the Commission in November 2017 and was presented to a joint session of the Legislature's Transportation and Telecommunications and Appropriations Committees the following month. In the 2018 session, LB993 created the 911 Service System Advisory Committee, the 911 Service System Fund and authorized the beginning of implementation of NG911 in Nebraska.

LB993 combined the Wireless E911 Fund created in 2001, with the 911 Service System Fund. The 911 Service System Fund supports the implementation, coordination, deployment, management, and maintenance of 911 Service System and the NG911 Master Plan.

The History of 911

As technology has advanced over the last 56-years since the first 911 call was made in Haleyville, Alabama, the need for 911 capabilities has evolved as well. In the beginning, citizens had the ability to make basic 911 calls to a 911 center, or Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). With basic service, the PSAP received no location or identifying information with the call. The information had to be communicated by the calling party to the PSAP. As capabilities increased technology transitioned to Enhanced 911. With Enhanced 911, the PSAP received location and telephone number information with the 911 call based on the address of the wireline caller. Having this information allowed the PSAP to dispatch emergency services more quickly, even if the caller was not able to communicate their location or the nature of their emergency.

With the invention of wireless cellular phones, new challenges were identified with the location identification of 911 callers. 911 calls made from wireless cellular phones developed into Wireless Enhanced 911. There are three phases of Wireless E911. The most basic of these is "Wireless Phase 0." This means that when a person calls 911 from their wireless device, the PSAP in a city or county, possibly up to hundreds of miles away from the caller, may receive the call, but not receive the telephone number of the wireless device or the location of the caller. This presents potentially life-threatening issues due to delayed response time if the caller is unable to speak, does not know where they are, does not know their wireless telephone number, or if the call is dropped.

With "Wireless Phase I", a wireless call is received into the PSAP with the wireless device's telephone number and the location of the wireless cellular tower that received the call. This allows the PSAP to determine the general location of the calling party, usually within a few square miles. Although not ideal, this allows the call taker to identify the wireless carrier and the wireless subscriber's name.

With "Wireless Phase II", PSAP's have the ability to receive both the wireless caller's telephone number and their specific location by latitude and longitude.

When a wireless phone is turned on, whether or not it is in use, it periodically transmits signals to the wireless network, so the wireless network knows which cellular towers to deliver calls to if the device is used. With the network-based solution, special radio intercept equipment is installed on cellular towers to accomplish the location task.

When a wireless call is placed, the towers can compare signals from any active wireless device and pinpoint the call using triangulation (the difference in time between the arrival of the signal at different receiving stations or by the signal's angle of arrival at each tower). It takes at least three towers to get an accurate location. This solution is called network-based because the signal measurements and location calculations are performed in the wireless network.

The handset-based solution utilizes a wireless device equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment that can measure the time of arrival of signals transmitted from GPS satellites in order to calculate its position.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established Wireless Accuracy Standards for horizontal accuracy that went into effect April 3, 2017. The standard requires that all wireless calls must provide a dispatchable location or x/y location (latitude and longitude) within 50 meters for 80% as of April 2021.

The Future of Nebraska's 911 Service System

On April 4, 2018, LB993 was signed into law paving the way for the Commission to begin implementation of Next Generation 911 (NG911) service in Nebraska. LB993 authorized the Commission to establish a 911 Service System Advisory Committee, merged the E911 Wireless fund with the 911 Service System Fund, and authorized the Commission to proceed with the implementation of the 911 Service System.

Next Generation 911 utilizes an Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network (ESInet) to allow PSAPs to receive voice communication, data, photos, and video from mobile devices. To implement Next Generation 911, a robust broadband network interconnects regions of PSAPs. Nebraska PSAPs have organized into seven Host/Remote regions. In the regional environment, two PSAPs function as the "Hosts" and the remainder function as "Remotes".

The "Host" PSAPs are equipped with the expensive Call Handling Equipment (CHE) necessary to receive 911 calls. The "Remote" PSAPs interconnect to the "Hosts" via a regional Internet Protocol (IP) network. This configuration allows for the sharing of equipment and resources and drives the expensive costs of call handling equipment down. It also adds resiliency and redundancy to the 911 system.

In addition to the establishment of an ESInet, Next Generation 911 involves locating and routing calls geospatially, which requires the use of precise Geographic Information System (GIS) data. The Commission is working with the PSAPs and GIS specialists to create and maintain the necessary data to locate and route 911 calls in the Next Generation 911 environment. The Commission contracted with West Safety Services/Intrado to conduct Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) checks on Nebraska's GIS data so the requirements of a NENA i3³ NG911 system can be achieved.

After issuing a Request For Proposal (RFP) for a statewide ESInet and NG911 Core Services, the Commission executed a five-year contract in January 2021 with Lumen (formerly CenturyLink) and its partner Intrado to provide these services. In early 2022, the first Region with 22 PSAPs migrated to the statewide ESInet. Since then, all but one PSAP has connected to the 911 Service System. With 66 PSAPs connected to the system 99% of Nebraska's population and 99% of the state's geography is served by the Next Generation 911 System. The Commission expects the remaining PSAP to connect in the next fiscal year.

The Commission has established the 911 Service System Advisory Committee (911 SSAC). This Committee includes representatives of State, County and City Government officials, Law Enforcement,

³ NENA i3 is the national standard that all states are working to achieve to implement Next Generation 911

Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management personnel, as well as representatives of the telecommunications industry. The Committee has formed several working groups to make recommendations in the following areas: technical, GIS, training, operations, and funding. In the last year, ad hoc working groups were created to develop interoperability standards between 911/988 and to develop 911 rules and regulations. 988 is the three-digit number assigned to the National Suicide Hotline. The working groups make recommendations to the 911 Service System Advisory Committee. The Committee will in turn make recommendations to the Commission.



The Commission holds a 911 Service System Advisory Committee meeting.

Eventually, in the Next Generation 911 environment, citizens seeking emergency assistance will be able to contact 911 utilizing voice communications, text messages, photos, videos, and other digital media means. The identification of a caller's location and the routing of that call to the appropriate PSAP will be greatly enhanced, ultimately improving the chances of receiving emergency assistance much faster and saving lives.

Funding

Since July 1, 2001, a surcharge had been collected from each subscriber of a wireless phone with a billing address in Nebraska. Wireless carriers remit the surcharge to the Commission 60 days after the last day of the month. The surcharge is currently set at \$.70 per line for each wireless subscriber in Nebraska except for residents of Douglas County. There is a statutory cap for Douglas County that limits the surcharge rate to \$.50 per line. For fiscal year 2023-2024, the 911 Service System fund collected approximately \$13 million dollars.

The Prepaid Wireless Surcharge Act was passed by the Legislature in 2012 and updated as a result of LB 157 in 2018. Under this Act, each retail seller of prepaid wireless telecommunication services collects the Wireless surcharges directly from the consumer at the point-of-sale. The amount of the surcharge collected per retail transaction is based on an annual determination by the Nebraska Department of Revenue utilizing a formula of the amount of prepaid wireless surcharges.

Amounts collected are remitted by retailer to the Department of Revenue. In fiscal year 2023-2024 this amounted to over 1% of the total sale. Retailers are permitted to deduct and retain 3% of prepaid wireless surcharges. The Department of Revenue will then remit the collected amounts less administrative costs not to exceed 2%, to the State Treasurer for credit to the 911 Service System fund.

As Nebraska transitioned to Next Generation 911, the Commission adopted a new NG911 funding model. This model prioritizes funding for the statewide Next Generation 911 Service System, to include the costs of the ESInet, NG911 Core Services, GIS data maintenance, and a statewide Management Information System. Additionally, the 911 Service System Fund continues to allocate money to the PSAPs using a formula that identifies 40% of available funds for a base amount that each PSAP receives, 40% based on a PSAPs call volume, and 20% based on the population of the area served. As PSAPs connected to the ESInet and the NG911 Service System, they transitioned to the new NG911 funding model.

Training and Technical Standards

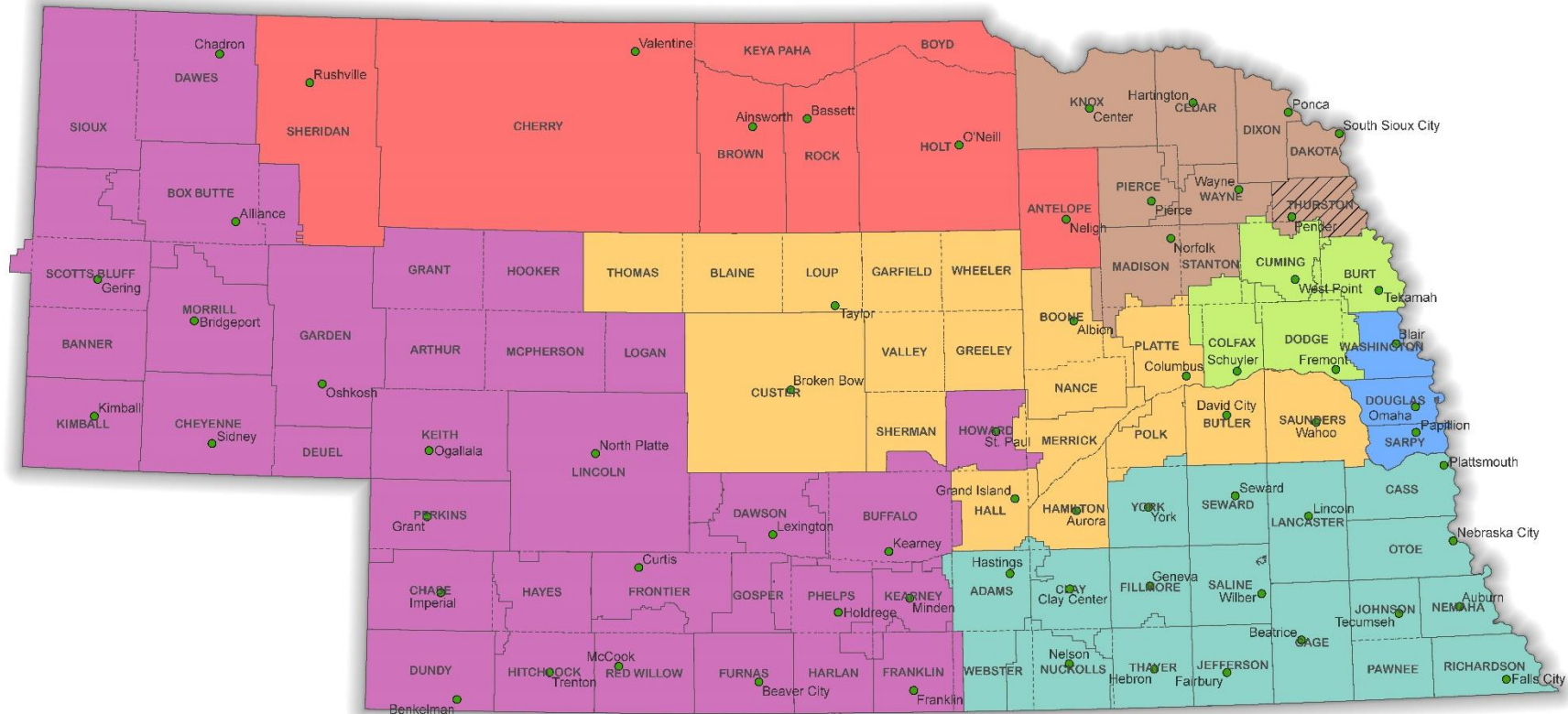
Since the inception of 911 in Nebraska, statewide mandatory training standards have not existed. The Training Working Group and the 911 Service System Advisory Committee have worked to develop mandatory training standards that each telecommunicator must complete. In the fall of 2021, the Commission adopted the training standards. Effective January 1, 2022, all telecommunicators were required to complete a 911 40-hour basic course by the end of 2022. The standards include a requirement for continuing education as well.

Wireline 911 Information

Wireline 911 surcharge information reported to the Commission by local telephone carriers in Nebraska can be found on the Commission's website:

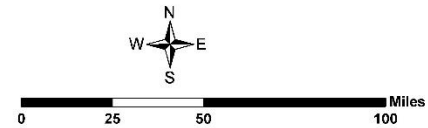
<https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/2024-annual-report-legislature> select 911 Wireline Report). If specific exchange information is not listed, it is because the local telephone carrier did not file the information.

Nebraska PSAP Regionalization



Legend

- East Central 911
- Metro
- MidEast Regional 911
- North Central
- Northeast Nebraska 911
- South Central/Panhandle
- Order Issued, Implementation Pending
- PSAP Locations



Prepared by: NPSC
PSAP Regionalization
07/29/2024



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

During the 2024 Legislative session, several bills were passed that impacted the Commission's operations. LB 61, introduced by Senator Tom Brandt and signed by Governor Pillen on March 18th, 2024, made significant changes to the dark fiber leasing statutes, including updates to the filing requirements for agencies or political subdivisions of the state that wish to lease dark fiber. Lessees or licensees are required to file the lease or license with the Commission, the Commission is required to notice the lease or license, and an opportunity to challenge the lease or license is available to any internet service provider. The fees for the lease or license must also fall within the Commission's safe harbor range of market rates. The new statutes allow for a mediation process in the event there is a dispute over whether locations served by the lease are unserved.

LB 607 made a change to the amount that the Commission could award for the 211 Information and Referral Network. This bill was introduced by Senator Mike McDonnell and signed by Governor Pillen on April 2nd, 2024. The bill removed language stating the grant amount would be \$955,000. Bills passed in prior sessions provided for additional funding for the grant, but the language that was removed limited the amount that the Commission could award. The Commission notes that funding for this grant has been provided through interest earned in the Nebraska Universal Service Fund. The Commission recommends that the Legislature finds a permanent funding source for the 211 Information and Referral Network.

LB 1031, introduced by Senator Bruce Bostelman, was signed into law by Governor Pillen on April 15th, 2024. Several separate bills were amended into LB 1031 during the session, so there are a few different areas within the Commission's purview that were affected. One portion of the bill made significant changes to the TRS Specialized Equipment Program (NSTEP), modifying eligibility for deaf, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired persons. The bill allowed two persons per household to receive the NSTEP benefit (only 1 person per household was allowed previously), and the reapplication frequency was changed allowing persons to apply once every three years instead of once every five years. Other provisions changed requirements of the NUSF such that ongoing support provided through the fund would eventually only be allocated to locations that are capable of broadband service at 100/20 Mbps (Down/Up).

LB 1031 also had provisions that affected the 911 Department and/or 911 operations. Neb. Rev. Stat. §86-1029.04 sets forth a timeline for Originating Service Providers to connect to the 911 Service System. Finally, Neb. Rev. Stat. §86-1031 places reporting requirements on Originating Service Providers when they experience an outage that impacts call delivery to 911.

LB 1200 (now Neb. Rev. Stat. §86-1025) contained an amendment that was originally a bill introduced by Senator Frederickson (LB 929) that Requires the Public Service Commission and the Department of Health and Human Services to develop standards for transferring calls between 911 and 988.

Recommendations

The Commission occasionally receives applications from telecommunications carriers for approval of debt financing pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 75-148 – 75-151. Section 75-148 requires a common carrier that issues stocks, bonds, notes, or other evidence of indebtedness

to obtain the consent of the Commission. Section 75-150 requires that a carrier submitting such an application must remit a fee of up to \$2,500 to the General Fund.

The Commission has entered orders with findings that the applications received are in compliance with statute and that the debt financing is reasonably required for the purposes outlined in the application. However, it is difficult for the Commission to properly assess that the debt financing is “reasonably required” for interests that are not within Nebraska and/or its jurisdiction. Often, applicants have few, if any, customers in Nebraska, and the debt financing requests are for amounts well above what could reasonably be expected to be necessary for Nebraska operations. These applications are often received in the context of large company restructurings or mergers involving numerous affiliated entities, in which case the Commission believes the lender issuing the debt financing is in the best position to assess the company’s financial fitness. Additionally, in practice, the Commission finds that most applicants under this section must pay the maximum fee of \$2,500 under § 75-150. This fee is very high relative to other application fees charged by the Commission. The Commission believes this section of statute should be examined for its relevance and applicability in today’s telecommunication’s regulatory structure.

The Nebraska Broadband Bridge Program has completed three grant cycles, and is conducting a fourth in 2024, that have brought broadband service to thousands of unserved and underserved Nebraskans. While no sunset date exists for the program, it is funded through General Funds, so a reappropriation of funds will be necessary for the next biennium.

As noted above in the Summary section regarding LB 697 and the 211 Information and Referral Network, the Commission recommends that the Legislature finds a permanent funding source for the network.

The Commission appreciates the attention paid by the Legislature to matters involving telecommunications and looks forward to working collaboratively with the Legislature in future sessions.

APPENDIX A – LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIERS, ACCESS LINES, AND RATES

Carrier	Residential Rates	Residential Lines Served	Business Rates	Business Lines Served
AT&T Communication of the Midwest	\$25.95	0	34.95	5,139
Action Communications, Inc.	VoIP	1	VoIP	6
Airespring, Inc.	VoIP	0	VoIP	49
Allo Communications, LLC	\$18.00	8,639	31.00	24,146
Applied Communications Technology Inc.	\$21.40	1	44.80	0
Arapahoe Telephone Company	\$19.95	593	23.25	357
Arlington Telephone Company	\$24.55	235	35.00	78
Aureon Communications, LLC	N/A	0	N/A	150
Benkelman Telephone Company	\$19.95	357	27.50	217
Blair Telephone Company	\$24.55	1,327	35.00	721
Broadview Networks, Inc.	VoIP	0	VoIP	46
Cambridge Telephone Company	\$19.95	222	27.50	216
CBTS Technology Solutions	VoIP	0	VoIP	104
Citizens Telecommunications Company of Nebraska (d/b/a Frontier)	\$21.50	3,039	32.50	4,171
Clear Rate Communications, LLC	VoIP	48	VoIP	166
Consolidated Telco, Inc.	\$19.95	398	27.50	240
Consolidated Telecom, Inc.	\$19.95	303	27.50	109
Consolidated Telephone Company	\$19.95	1,196	27.50	387
Cox Nebraska Telecom LLC	\$19.99	44,083	ICB	50,000
Cozad Telephone Company	\$19.95	444	29.95	503
Crexendo Business Solutions, Inc.	VoIP	0	VoIP	709
Curtis Telephone Company	\$19.95	144	27.50	131
Dalton Telephone Company, Inc.	\$19.25	371	29.95	96
Diller Telephone Company	\$19.95	457	27.50	103
dishNET Wireline, LLC	\$42.00	85	N/A	0
Eastern Nebraska Telephone Company	\$24.55	772	35.00	675
Elsie Communications, Inc.	\$19.25	51	29.95	33
FiberComm, LLC	\$19.00	5	19.00	287
First Communications, LLC	N/A	0	27.55	5

France Telecom Corporate Solutions, LLC	VoIP	0	VoIP	46
Fusion Communications, LLC	N/A	0		207
Glenwood Network Services, Inc. (Keystone-Arthur)	\$19.95	467	29.95	50
Glenwood Telecommunications, Inc.	\$19.95	172	29.95	807
Glenwood Telephone Membership Corporation	\$19.95	1,472	29.95	272
Granite Telecommunications	N/A	0	30.00	3,681
Great Plains Broadband, Inc.	\$17.50	697	27.50	9,514
Great Plains Communications, Inc.	\$19.20	7,571	29.95	3,999
Hamilton Long Distance Company	\$17.95	20	ICB	373
Hamilton Telephone Company	\$17.95	1,896	17.95	1,124
Hartington Telephone Co., Inc.	\$20.00	443	27.50	344
Hartman Telephone Exchanges, Inc.	\$19.95	162	27.50	46
Hemingford Cooperative Telephone Company	\$19.90	408	27.50	130
Henderson Cooperative Telephone d/b/a Mainstay	\$19.95	343	27.50	157
Hershey Cooperative Telecom, Inc.	\$20.00	229	27.50	70
Hooper Telephone d/b/a Westel Systems	\$19.95	286	27.50	110
Huntel Cablevision, Inc. d/b/a American Broadband Nebraska Communications, Inc.	\$20.19	593	29.59	639
K & M Telephone Company	\$17.50	285	17.50	103
Level 3 Communications, LLC	VoIP	0	VoIP	4,493
Level 3 Telecom Data Services, LLC	VoIP	0	VoIP	90
Long Lines Siouxland LLC	\$10.00	249	25.00	325
MCImetro Access Transmission Services	\$20.99	20	30.99	29
McLeodUSA Telecommunications Services, Inc. d/b/a Paetec Business Services	N/A	0	29.50	627
Metropolitan Telecommunications of Nebraska Inc.	N/A	0	27.55	1,022
Midstates Data Transport, LLC	VoIP	146	VoIP	1,221

Mobius Communications Company	\$17.50	294	27.50	143
Nebraska Technology & Telecommunications, Inc. (NT&T)	\$17.50	2,511	27.50	426
Nebraska Central Telephone Company	\$17.95	2,341	17.95	935
Northeast Nebraska Telephone Company	\$20.00	3,241	27.50	845
NOS Communications, Inc.		0		2
PBN, LLC	\$17.50	3	20.45	163
Pierce Telephone Company, Inc.	\$19.95	661	29.95	246
Pinpoint Communications, Inc.	\$17.50	399	27.50	353
Plainview Telephone Company	\$19.95	405	27.50	178
Quantumshift Communications, Inc.	N/A	0	32.84	13
Qwest Corporation d/b/a CenturyLink QC	\$30.50	16,483	43.50	20,557
Rock County Telephone Company	\$24.55	275	35.00	174
Sodtoun Telephone Company	\$17.50	36	17.50	4
Southeast Nebraska Telephone Company	\$19.95	1,132	29.95	476
Spectrotel of the West, LLC	VoIP	0	VoIP	225
Spectrum Advanced Services	VoIP	30,722	VoIP	9,815
Stanton Telephone Company, Inc.	\$19.95	330	29.95	149
Teleport Communications of America, LLC	N/A	0	42.55	1,078
Three River Communications, LLC	\$18.00	237	27.50	239
Three River Telco	\$20.00	604	27.50	144
United Telephone Co. of the West (d/b/a CenturyLink)	\$23.00	1,103	40.00	1,034
Wauneta Telephone Company	\$19.95	199	27.50	89
Windstream Nebraska, Inc.	\$17.50	28,772	31.99	26,555
Windstream New Edge, LLC	N/A	0		40
Windstream of the Midwest, Inc.	\$16.00	0	37.00	689
XO Communications Services, LLC	VoIP	0	VoIP	125

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Telecommunications

COMPETITIVE LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIERS (CLECS)

To view a list of certificated competitive local exchange carriers, visit <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> and select "Competitive Local Telephone Companies" from the "Lists of Carriers" section.

COMMUNICATIONS INFORMATION PROVIDERS:

To view a list of communications information providers, visit the Commission's website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications>. Click on "Lists of Carriers" and select "Communications Provider Registry" from the list.

LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CARRIERS

To view a list of long distance telephone carriers, visit the Commission's website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications>. Click on "Lists of Carriers" and select "Interexchange Carriers" from the list.

INTERCONNECTION AGREEMENTS/AMENDMENTS

Go to <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/telecommunications> and select "Interconnection Information" under "Other." Select "Interconnection Agreements" to search for agreements by company.

SERVICE OUTAGE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

To view reporting requirements carriers are required to follow for service outages, visit <https://psc.nebraska.gov/sites/psc.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Service%20Outage%20Reporting%20Requirements.pdf>.

TARIFFS

Go to <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/local-tariffs> to see all tariffs submitted to the Commission.

Nebraska Universal Service Fund

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION PROHIBITED EQUIPMENT LIST

Information regarding the Commission's efforts with respect to the FCC's Prohibited Equipment proceedings can be found here: <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/c-5493c-5520-prohibited-equipment>.

HIGH COST PROGRAM ALLOCATIONS

The allocations for the 2024, 2023, and 2022 calendar years can be found on the Commission website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/high-cost-information> – click on the links with "NUSF High Cost Support Distribution" in the name.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Guidelines for all NUSF programs can be found on the Commission's website by visiting, <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications>. Click on "Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF)" and select the appropriate program.

Broadband Programs

BROADBAND BRIDGE AND CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND MAP

The Commission maps all project areas for proposed projects submitted through the application process these two programs. To see the map, visit <https://gis.ne.gov/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9dc876af8ea541daa28d7dc82378e5ca>.

BROADBAND MAP

Visit <http://broadbandmap.nebraska.gov> to view information about broadband deployment projects in Nebraska.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

To view the program guide made available for Broadband Bridge and Capital Projects Funds grant programs, visit the Commission's website at <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/nebraska-broadband-bridge-program-nbbpcapital-projects-fund-cpf>. Guidelines can be found under "Applicant Instructions and Materials" for each program.

State 911

911 WIRELINE REPORT

To view the 2024 911 Wireline Report, visit <https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/2024-annual-report-legislature>. Select 911 Wireline Report.

