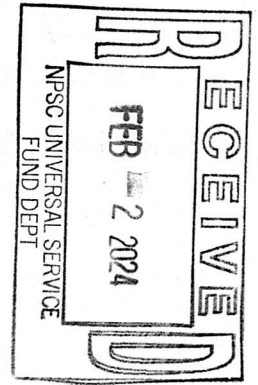


BEFORE THE NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Nebraska Public Service Commission, on its own motion, to consider appropriate modifications to the high-cost distribution and reporting mechanisms in its Universal Service Fund program in light of federal and state infrastructure grants.) Application No. NUSF-139)))))



**IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITIZATION OF ISSUES FOR
WORKSHOP AND HEARING**

Windstream Nebraska, Inc. ("Windstream") hereby submits the following recommendations regarding the Nebraska Public Service Commission's ("Commission") request in its *NUSF-139 Scheduling Order*¹ requesting interested parties to identify issues and recommend prioritization of issues for the March workshop and hearing.

Issue Identification and Prioritization

Windstream has identified the following priority issues related to this docket:

- A. Reform Timing with Rural Broadband Deployment: In light of the unprecedented levels of infrastructure grants coming from the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund ("RDOF"), the State Local Fiscal Recovery Fund ("SLFRF"), the Capital Projects Fund ("CPF") or the much anticipated Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program ("BEAD"), which are all targeted at reaching the most rural areas of the state, Windstream believes it prudent to discuss if the Commission should take any reform actions at this time. With these programs in various steps of the "build" phase and with BEAD not even yet in an application phase, it will be nearly impossible to assess what the support needs will be in the future.
- B. Cost Modeling Reform: Windstream understands that as part of this review effort the Commission

¹ *In the Matter of the Nebraska Public Service Commission, on its own motion, to consider appropriate modifications to the high-cost distribution and reporting mechanisms in its Universal Service Fund program in light of federal and state infrastructure grants, Application No. NUSF-139, Order Establishing Procedural Schedule and Setting Hearing (Jan. 22, 2024) (the "NUSF-139 Scheduling Order").*

is seeking ways to increase provider participation in the Universal Service Funded projects. Windstream believes it would be prudent to discuss during the workshop reverting the program back to the project-based model that was previously in place along with modernizing the cost-based modeling to reflect current costs.

- C. Competitive Areas: As competition increases, spreading further into rural areas in light of the federal programs described above, incumbent local exchange carriers should have the ability to relinquish receipt of support in exchange for deregulation or a form of alternative regulation. During the workshop the Parties should discuss a pathway to allow for light-touch or not-touch regulation in areas where competition exists. This discussion is also helpful to determine what the future of the program may look like.
- D. Alternative Uses of USF Support: The Parties should discuss if there are alternative uses outside of broadband deployment that could be supported by USF, for example support for carriers incurring expenses related to the transition to next-generation 911 or projects to support Precision Agriculture, which extends deployed broadband from the home to the State's agricultural facilities.

Conclusion

Windstream appreciates the opportunity to provide its feedback and recommendations on the issues and priorities of those issues in response to the *NUSF-139 Scheduling Order*. Windstream looks forward to its continued participation in this proceeding.

Respectfully submitted on this the 2nd day of February, 2024.

WINDSTREAM NEBRASKA, INC.

By: /s/ Mary E. Vaggalis
Mary E. Vaggalis, #25776
Bruning Law Group
1125 Q Street, Suite 501
Lincoln, NE 68508
mary@bruninglawgroup.com