



June 24, 2021

Public Service Commission
1200 N Street, Suite 300
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Application No. C-5272 – Public Comment

Dear Public Service Commission Officials:

On behalf of the Central Nebraska Economic Development District, who represents 14 counties in North and Central Nebraska, we would like to provide public comment for Application No. C-5272 (Order Opening Docket, Seeking Comment and Setting Hearing) for the State's Broadband Bridge Act, which was signed by the Governor on May 26, 2021.

We want to thank the Public Service Commission for their diligence in drafting the document, including the PSC's initial recommendations and questions for consideration.

After review of the docket, CNEDD offers the following public comments:

- 1) Item 4 – Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Status – While we recognize that long-term providers have a history of delivering services in the State, that long-term history may not always equate to reliable service. Because of a connection to their communities, local providers may provide better service than nationally-based providers; therefore, we would recommend that past ETC reporting compliance be a relevant factor over the number of years a carrier has been an ETC provider.
- 2) Item 5 – Rates – The provision of broadband connectivity in rural communities has lagged behind the services provided in more urban settings. The statement "The Commission has proposed a rate comparability scoring metric where there must be a showing that the rates offered will be equivalent to what is offered elsewhere," causes us to question what the definition of "elsewhere" means. CNEDD would propose that "elsewhere" be defined as broadband rates that are comparable to "urban providers," which we know are more affordable than some rural rates which tend to be at least double the rates that providers are charging in urban settings. Rural Nebraska communities are competing with urban communities to attract families and workforce, and the cost of broadband can play a role in the attraction of people to rural Nebraska.
- 3) Item 7 – Points for Number of Households – The digital divide between urban and rural has always been tied to the number of households to be served. Urban communities already have a greater competitive advantage over smaller rural communities when it comes to costs per household to deliver broadband infrastructure. While CNEDD recognizes the desire to invest State dollars where it will serve the greatest number of people, by awarding more points for the greatest number of households to be served will perpetuate that divide. One alternative would be to set aside a percentage of the total funds to be awarded to projects that serve smaller communities, in order to ensure that the bridge between urban and rural has a chance to become smaller over time.



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- 4) Distribution of Support – CNEDD has worked with several state and federal grant programs in the past, and would like to recommend the following as an option for distribution of funds: provide a percentage of the award up front (maybe 10-20%), followed by pro-rate distributions based on written documentation (invoices, etc). This distribution method would enable the provider to have funds to work with at the start, followed by a shared investment into the project through the pro-rata distribution.
- 5) Post Award Testing – CNEDD concurs with the PSC’s recommendation that the testing should be conducted during times of peak usage, to ensure a better customer service during those peak times. We would recommend that post-award testing be conducted by an independent testing method, instead of the provider conducting the test, to ensure that the broadband speeds are consistent with the speeds that are required to be provided.

Thank you for allowing us to provide public comment for Nebraska’s Broadband Bridge Act guidelines. I can be reached at 402-340-0106 if further discussion about our comments is desired.

Sincerely,



Judy Petersen
Executive Director