

CHAPTER 26. SUBSTANTIVE RULES APPLICABLE TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PROVIDERS.

Subchapter P. TEXAS UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND.

§26.403. Texas High Cost Universal Service Plan (THCUSP).

- (a) **Purpose.** This section establishes guidelines for financial assistance to eligible telecommunications providers (ETPs) that serve the high cost rural areas of the state, other than study areas of small and rural incumbent local exchange companies (ILECs), so that basic local telecommunications service may be provided at reasonable rates in a competitively neutral manner.
- (b) **Application.** This section applies to telecommunications providers that have been designated ETPs by the commission in accordance with §26.417 of this title (relating to Designation as Eligible Telecommunications Providers to Receive Texas Universal Service Funds (TUSF)).
- (c) **Definitions.** The following words and terms when used in this section have the following meaning unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:
- (1) **Business line** -- The telecommunications facilities providing the communications channel that serves a single-line business customer's service address. For the purpose of this definition, a single-line business line is one to which multi-line hunting, trunking, or other special capabilities do not apply. For a line served by an ILEC, a business line is a line served in accordance with the ILEC's business service tariff or a package that includes such a tariffed service. For a line served by an ILEC in accordance with a customer specific contract or that is otherwise not served in accordance with a tariff, to qualify as a business line, the service must be provided in accordance with a customer application, subscriber agreement, or contract entered into by a public or private organization of any character, or a representative or agent of such entity, irrespective of the person or entity in actual possession of the telephone device. For a line that is served by an ETP other than an ILEC, to qualify as a business line, the service must be provided in accordance with a customer application, subscriber agreement, or contract entered into by a public or private organization of any character, or a representative or agent of such entity, irrespective of the person or entity in actual possession of the telephone device.
 - (2) **Eligible line** -- A residential line or a single-line business line over which an ETP provides the service supported by the THCUSP through its own facilities, purchase of unbundled network elements (UNEs), or a combination of its own facilities and purchase of UNEs. An eligible line may be a business line or a residential line but cannot be both.
 - (3) **Eligible telecommunications provider (ETP)** -- A telecommunications provider designated by the commission in accordance with §26.417 of this title.
 - (4) **Physical 911 address** -- For the purposes of this section, a physical 911 address is an address transmitted to the applicable emergency service providers by an ETP with respect to a line that is not stated in GPS coordinates.
 - (5) **Residential line** -- The telecommunications facilities providing the communications channel that serves a residential customer's service address. For the purpose of this definition, a residential line is one to which multi-line hunting, trunking, or other special capabilities do not apply. A line that qualifies as a business line does not qualify as a residential line.
 - (6) **Service Address** -- For the purposes of this section, a business or residential customer's service address is defined using the following criteria:
 - (A) A service address is the unique physical street address, including any suite or unit number, where a line is provided to a customer, except as provided in clauses (i)-(ii) and subparagraph (B) of this paragraph.
 - (i) If no unique physical street address is available, a physical 911 address must be used.
 - (ii) If no unique physical street address and no physical 911 address are available, the business or residential customer's service address must be an area of land under common operation or use as defined by a deed, state permit, lease name, or licensed or registered field of operation, which must

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be described by an ETP using GPS coordinates. Multiple buildings within a single area of land under common operation or use must not qualify as separate service addresses, even if the GPS coordinates for each building are different.

- (B) For eligible lines served using commercial mobile radio service, a service address for such a line may be the customer's billing address for the purposes of this definition.
- (d) **Service to be supported by the THCUSP.** The THCUSP must support basic local telecommunications services provided by an ETP in high cost rural areas of the state. Local measured residential service, if chosen by the customer and offered by the ETP, must also be supported.
- (1) **Initial determination of the definition of basic local telecommunications service.** Basic local telecommunications service must consist of the following:
- (A) flat rate, single party residential and business local exchange telephone service, including primary directory listings;
 - (B) tone dialing service;
 - (C) access to operator services;
 - (D) access to directory assistance services;
 - (E) access to 911 service where provided by a local authority;
 - (F) telecommunications relay service;
 - (G) the ability to report service problems seven days a week;
 - (H) availability of an annual local directory;
 - (I) access to toll services; and
 - (J) lifeline service.
- (2) **Subsequent determinations.**
- (A) Initiation of subsequent determinations.
 - (i) The definition of the services to be supported by the THCUSP must be reviewed by the commission every three years from September 1, 1999.
 - (ii) The commission may initiate a review of the definition of the services to be supported on its own motion at any time.
 - (B) **Criteria to be considered in subsequent determinations.** In evaluating whether services should be added to or deleted from the list of supported services, the commission may consider the following criteria:
 - (i) the service is essential for participation in society;
 - (ii) a substantial majority, 75% of residential customers, subscribe to the service;
 - (iii) the benefits of adding the service outweigh the costs; and
 - (iv) the availability of the service, or subscription levels, would not increase without universal service support.
- (e) **Criteria for determining amount of support under THCUSP.** The commission will determine the amount of per-line support to be made available to ETPs in each eligible wire center in accordance with this section. The amount of support available to each ETP must be calculated using the base support amount as of the effective date of this section and applying the annual reductions as described in this subsection. As used in this subsection, "basic local telecommunications service" refers to services available to residential customers only, and "exchange" or "wire center" refer to regulated exchanges or wire centers only.
- (1) **Determining base support amount available to ILEC ETPs.** The initial annual base support amount for an ILEC ETP must be the annualized monthly THCUSP support amount for the month preceding the effective date of this section, less the 2011 amount of support disbursed to the ILEC ETP from the federal universal service fund for High Cost Loop, High Cost Model, Safety Net Additive, and Safety Valve components of the frozen high-cost support as

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determined by the Universal Service Administration Company in accordance with 47 C.F.R. §54.312(a). The initial per-line monthly support amount for a wire center must be the per-line support amount for the wire center for the month preceding the effective date of this section, less each wire center's pro rata share of one-twelfth of the 2011 amount of support disbursed to the ILEC ETP from the federal universal service fund for High Cost Loop, High Cost Model, Safety Net Additive, and Safety Valve components of the frozen high-cost support determined by the Universal Service Administration Company in accordance with 47 C.F.R §54.312(a). The initial annual base support amount must be reduced annually as described in paragraph (3) of this subsection.

- (2) **Determination of the reasonable rate.** The reasonable rate for basic local telecommunications service will be determined by the commission in a contested case proceeding. To the extent that an ILEC ETP's existing rate for basic local telecommunications service in any wire center is less than the reasonable rate, the ILEC ETP may, over time, increase its rates for basic local telecommunications service to an amount not to exceed the reasonable rate. The increase to the existing rate must not in any one year exceed an amount to be determined by the commission in the contested case proceeding. An ILEC ETP may, in its sole discretion, accelerate its THCUSP reduction in any year by as much as 10% and offset such reduction with a corresponding local rate increase in order to produce rounded rates. In no event will any such acceleration obligate the ETP to reduce its THCUSP support in excess of the total reduction obligation initially calculated under paragraph (3) of this subsection.
- (3) **Annual reductions to THCUSP base support and per-line support recalculation.** As part of the contested case proceeding referenced in paragraph (2) of this subsection, each ILEC ETP must, using line counts as of the end of the month preceding the effective date of this rule, calculate the amount of additional revenue that would result if the ILEC ETP were to charge the reasonable rate for basic local telecommunications service to all residential customers for those services where the price, or imputed price, are below the reasonable rate. Lines in exchanges for which an application for deregulation is pending as of June 1, 2012 must not be included in this calculation. If the application for deregulation for any such exchanges subsequently is denied by the commission, the ILEC ETP must, within 20 days of the final order denying such application, submit revised calculations including the lines in those exchanges for which the application for deregulation was denied. Without regard to whether an ILEC ETP increases its rates for basic local telecommunications service to the reasonable rate, the ILEC ETP's annual base support must be reduced on January 1 of each year for four consecutive years, with the first reduction occurring on January 1, 2013. The ETP's annual base support amount must be reduced by 25% of the additional revenue calculated in accordance with this paragraph in each year of the transition period. This reduction must be accomplished by reducing support for each wire center served by the ETP proportionally.
- (4) **Portability.** The support amounts established in accordance with this section are applicable to all ETPs and are portable with the customer.
- (5) **Limitation on availability of THCUSP support.**
 - (A) THCUSP support must not be provided in a wire center in a deregulated market that has a population of at least 30,000.
 - (B) An ILEC may receive support from the THCUSP for a wire center in a deregulated market that has a population of less than 30,000 only if the ILEC demonstrates to the commission that the ILEC needs the support to provide basic local telecommunications service at reasonable rates in the affected market. An ILEC may use evidence from outside the wire center at issue to make the demonstration. An ILEC may make the demonstration for a wire center before or after submitting a petition to deregulate the market in which the wire center is located.
- (6) **Total Support Reduction Plan.** Within 10 days of the effective date of this section, an ILEC may elect to participate in a Total Support Reduction Plan (TSRP) as prescribed in this

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subsection, by filing a notification of such participation with the commission. The TSRP would serve as an alternative to the reduction plan prescribed in paragraph (3) of this subsection. The TSRP will be implemented as follows:

- (A) For an ILEC making this election, the ILEC must reduce its THCUSP funding in accordance with paragraph (3) of this subsection with the exception that THCUSP reductions due to exchange deregulation may be credited against the electing ILEC's annual reduction obligation in the calendar year immediately following such deregulation.
- (B) In no event will an electing ILEC seek or receive THCUSP funding after January 1, 2017 even if the electing ILEC would otherwise be entitled to such funding as of this date.

(f) **Support Reduction.** Subject to the provisions of §26.405(f)(3) of this title (relating to Financial Need for Continued Support), the commission will adjust the support to be made available from the THCUSP according to the following criteria.

- (1) For each ILEC that is not electing under subsection (e)(6) of this section and that served greater than 31,000 access lines in this state on September 1, 2022, or a company or cooperative that is a successor to such an ILEC, the monthly per-line support that the ILEC is eligible to receive for each exchange on December 31, 2023 from the THCUSP is reduced:
 - (A) on January 1, 2024, to 75 percent of the level of support the ILEC was eligible to receive on December 31, 2023;
 - (B) on January 1, 2025, to 50 percent of the level of support the ILEC was eligible to receive on December 31, 2023;
 - (C) on January 1, 2026, to 25 percent of the level of support the ILEC was eligible to receive on December 31, 2023; and
 - (D) on January 1, 2027, to zero percent of the level of support the ILEC was eligible to receive on December 31, 2023.
- (2) An ILEC subject to this subsection may file a petition to show financial need for continued support, in accordance with §26.405(f)(1) of this title, before January 1, 2027.

(g) **Reporting requirements.** An ETP that receives support in accordance with this section must report the following information:

- (1) **Monthly reporting requirement.** An ETP must report the following to the TUSF administrator on a monthly basis:
 - (A) the total number of eligible lines for which the ETP seeks TUSF support; and
 - (B) a calculation of the base support computed in accordance with the requirements of subsection (d) of this section.
- (2) **Quarterly filing requirements.** An ETP must file quarterly reports with the commission showing actual THCUSP receipts by study area.
 - (A) Reports must be filed electronically in the project number assigned by the commission's central records office no later than 3:00 p.m. on the 30th calendar day after the end of the calendar quarter reporting period.
 - (B) Each ETP's reports must be filed on an individual company basis; reports that aggregate the disbursements received by two or more ETPs will not be accepted as complying with the requirements of this paragraph.
 - (C) All reports filed in accordance with paragraph (3) of this subsection must be publicly available.
- (3) **Annual reporting requirements.** An ETP must report annually to the TUSF administrator that it is qualified to participate in the THCUSP.

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- (4) **Other reporting requirements.** An ETP must report any other information that is required by the commission or the TUSF administrator, including any information necessary to assess contributions and disbursements from the TUSF.