

In the Matter of)	RM-11841
Modernizing the E-Rate Program for Schools)	
and Libraries)	WC Docket No. 13-184
)	WC Docket No. 10-90
Connect America Fund)	
)	
Schools and Libraries Universal Service)	CC Docket No. 02-6
Support Mechanism)	

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554**

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**REPLY COMMENTS OF
TEXAS STATEWIDE TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE, INC.**

Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (“TSTCI”),¹ by counsel, hereby submits these comments to urge the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) to open a rulemaking proceeding requested by the “Texas Carriers” Petition for Rulemaking filed May 22, 2019 in the above referenced proceedings.² The Texas Carriers’ Petition seeks to amend the agency’s Universal Service Fund (“USF”) in a matter to more efficiently provide high-quality broadband networks under the School and Libraries Program (“E-Rate), and eliminate unnecessary duplication in the vast rural areas where these carriers are already serving rural schools and libraries.

Many of the TSTCI-member companies have witnessed and experienced similar overbuilding of broadband as described in the Texas Carriers’ Petition. TSTCI companies, in like manner to the Texas Carriers, have built out federally-supported broadband networks to the

¹ TSTCI is the statewide association in Texas which represents the large majority of rural carriers which provide broadband service to the vast farm and ranch rural areas of Texas. TSTCI’s members are 39 incumbent local exchange carriers, each of which is attempting to efficiently and effectively provide a range of telecommunications via broadband service to the schools and libraries located in Texas’ extensive rural areas.

² The initial Petition for Rulemaking of Central Texas Telephone Cooperative, Inc. et al., RM-11841, CC Docket No. 02-6, WC Docket No. 13-184 (fil. May 22, 2019)(“Texas Carriers’ Petition” or “Petition”).

schools and libraries in their service areas, only now to witness third-party carriers now seeking additional federally-supported funds to essentially over-build and duplicate their existing rural broadband networks.

The TSTCI member companies provide service to their rural customer base located in almost half of the geographic area of Texas. In doing so they have constructed an extensive fiber optic network through the use of USF funding to these previously unserved-by-broadband rural consumers, businesses, school, libraries, law enforcement, governmental offices, etc.

TSTCI representatives have participated in a number of rural-broadband forums within the last two years in which other third-party, non-ILEC entities are advocating the use of overlapping federal funding to, in effect, duplicate the broadband network to serve specific qualifying customers, specifically schools and libraries. At a time when funding is already tight for full deployment of fiber into the rural areas of Texas and the nation, the FCC should open the requested rulemaking to insure its funding processes for USF are efficient, effective and not wasted on unnecessary deployment of a duplicative network which also is federally funded.

The initial comments of NTCA, Valley, Eastex and Nortex, and the Texas Carriers³ each provide specific factual background that outline the problems that necessitate the requested rulemaking by the Texas Carriers. TSTCI specifically adopts and endorses the initial comments of these similarly-situated carrier representatives, and strongly supports the initial request of the Texas Carriers for the initiation of such a rulemaking. The issue of region-based consortia groups, particularly in Texas but also in other states, which have issued Requests for Proposals (“RFPs”)

³ Comments of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”), Valley Telephone Cooperative Inc. (“Valley”), Comments of Eastex Telephone Cooperative, Inc. and Nortex Communications (“Eastex” and “Nortex”), and the initial Request and Petition of the “Texas Carriers”. These carriers each provide specific factual situations in their respective representative areas regarding the background of the issues presented, and the overbuilding potential involving unnecessary duplication of federally-funded resources in rural areas.

through the FCC's E-Rate program, for the construction of Wide Area Networks ("WANs") to provide broadband services to each school within the region is a major specific problem because many of the schools involved are already served by fiber. The precise requirements for many of these RFPs essentially excludes bidding by rural carriers which already have existing fiber networks serving the relevant schools.

TSTCI is a strong supporter of the FCC's E-Rate program, and the purposes for which it was established. However, TSTCI urges the FCC to open the requested rulemaking in order to review the potential abuses to the program created by the overbuilding and duplication of rural networks with federally-supported funds.

Due to rule changes in the E-Rate program, consortia purchasing processes have favored large vendors to the detriment of rural carriers who provide existing fiber-based, broadband networks which would be overbuilt by the winning bidders. This creates unnecessary duplication, inefficiencies, and redundancy, and as such, drains crucial USF resources to rural areas. TSTCI thus supports the rule changes proposed by the Texas Carriers to prevent abuse of the intended purposes of the USF programs.

Respectfully submitted,

Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative, Inc

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