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PUBLIC NOTICE

NOV 9 10 35 AM '99



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
445 12th STREET, S.W.
WASHINGTON, DC 20554

FCC 99J-2

News media information 202/418-0500 Fax-On-Demand 202/418-2830 Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov> <ftp.fcc.gov>

Released: November 3, 1999

FEDERAL-STATE JOINT BOARD ON UNIVERSAL SERVICE SEEKS COMMENT ON THE INTERIM HOLD-HARMLESS PROVISION OF THE COMMISSION'S HIGH-COST SUPPORT MECHANISM

CC Docket No. 96-45

On October 21, 1999, the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) adopted an order establishing a new forward-looking high-cost support mechanism for non-rural carriers.¹ Among other things, the new mechanism contains an interim hold-harmless provision, which ensures that the amount of support provided to a non-rural carrier on a per-line basis under the new mechanism will be no less than it receives under the existing high-cost support mechanism.² Specifically, to the extent that a non-rural carrier does not qualify for forward-looking support under the new mechanism, or qualifies for forward-looking support in an amount less than it would receive under the existing mechanism, the carrier shall receive interim hold-harmless support based on the existing mechanism.³

The Commission emphasized that the interim hold-harmless provision is a transitional measure that is intended to protect consumers in high-cost areas from potential rate shock during the shift to the new forward-looking mechanism.⁴ In this regard, the Commission requested that the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) provide it with a recommendation on or before July 1, 2000 concerning how the interim hold-harmless provision can be phased out or eliminated without causing undue disruption to consumer rates in high-cost areas.⁵ Accordingly, in this Public Notice, the Joint Board seeks comment on schedules and

¹ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Ninth Report & Order and Eighteenth Order on Reconsideration, FCC 99-306 (rel., Nov. 2, 1999) (*Methodology Order*).

² *Methodology Order*, FCC 99-306 at paras. 78-88.

³ *Methodology Order*, FCC 99-306 at para. 78.

⁴ *Methodology Order*, FCC 99-306 at para. 88.

⁵ *Methodology Order*, FCC 99-306 at para. 88. In addition, the Commission and the Joint Board intend to comprehensively review the operation of the new forward-looking mechanism no later than January 1, 2003. *Methodology Order*, FCC 99-306 at para. 88.

procedures for phasing out or eliminating the interim hold-harmless provision of the Commission's new forward-looking high-cost support mechanism for non-rural carriers.

Procedure for Filing Comments

Pursuant to Sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules,⁶ interested parties may file comments on or before **December 1, 1999**, and reply comments on or before **December 15, 1999**. All filings should reference *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, *Comments on the Interim Hold-Harmless Provision*, and should include the FCC number shown on this Public Notice. Comments may be filed using the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS) or by filing paper copies. See *Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings*, 63 Fed. Reg. 24,121 (1998).

Comments filed through the ECFS can be sent as an electronic file via the Internet to <http://www.fcc.gov/e-file/ecfs.html>. Only one copy of an electronic submission must be filed. In completing the transmittal screen, commenters should include their full name, Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket or rulemaking number. Parties may also submit electronic comments by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions for e-mail comments, commenters should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and should include the following words in the body of the message, "get form <your e-mail address>." A sample form and directions will be sent in reply. Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and four copies of each filing. All filings must be sent to the Commission's Secretary, Magalie Roman Salas, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 Twelfth Street, S.W., TW-A325, Washington, D.C. 20554.

Parties should also send paper copies of their filings to the individuals listed in the attached Service List.

⁶ 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.415, 1.419.

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