

November 10, 2020

To: The Utah Public Service Commission
From: Governor's Rural Partnership Board

Public Comments in Docket 20-2618-01
Re: Utah Universal Service Fund and Broadband in Rural Utah

Broadband connectivity is essential for teleworkers, education, healthcare, and the social lifeline for many confined during the coronavirus pandemic. The federal government defines broadband as 25 Mbps download and three Mbps upload. This definition is arguably inadequate, and that download rate is not met in many areas across the state. Utah should be setting a standard of one Gbps up and down wherever fiber broadband can be deployed.

We recognize the need for the Utah Universal Service Fund (UUSF) to facilitate universal telecommunications coverage to all Utahns, particularly in rural areas. We urge the Public Service Commission to continue using the fund to deploy and maintain broadband infrastructure and ensure the broadband service provision to Utah's high-cost rural areas.

We are concerned about the quality of broadband in Utah's rural counties and tribal lands. Today, our concern is primarily about the broadband quality in San Juan and Grand County counties. While some fiber optic has been installed, according to our state broadband availability map reported by providers, most are digital subscriber lines. Carriers report speeds from 6/1 up to 45/3, but coverage and quality vary by distance. Perfect copper cannot reach past 17,000 feet.

We have providers willing to come into these counties and serve the communities with fiber but are limited due to the current carrier restrictions in the UUSF. We urge the Public Service Commission to take action that will help improve the quality in that region. The ramifications will impact broadband access in other tribal lands and rural counties across the state.

Sincerely,

Steve Styler
Co-chair
Governor's Rural Partnership Board