

## Universal Service Fund Council Meeting

Hill Farms State Office Building  
Conference Room N115 on First Floor  
4822 Madison Yards Way, Madison, WI 53705

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PO Box 7854, Madison, WI 53707 or at (608) 266-1265

### Open Meeting Agenda for Tuesday, December 17, 2019 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

#### 1. Introductions, Welcome and Announcements

Attending in person: Jean Pauk, TDS, Council Chairperson; Jim Jermaine, AT&T; Council Vice Chairperson; Pam Holmes, Ultratec; Bob Kellerman, Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR); Brad Paul, WisCAP; Jerry Schneider, Marquette Adams Telephone Cooperative; and, Janet Zander, GWAAR.

Attending on the phone: Michele Ahlman, Clear Sounds; Scott Bohler, Frontier; Shari Brunes, Access to Independence; Ted Hankins, CenturyTel; Vanessa Johnson, New Concept; Nicole Mauritz, TDS; and, David Mortimer, Hospital Sisters Health System.

Commission staff: Peter Jahn, Telecommunications Analyst; Alyssa Kenney, Director of Digital Access; Billy Mauldin, TEPP Manager; Kristy Nieto, Division Administrator; Holly O'Higgins, USF Director; and, Jenna Schmidt, Chief Financial Officer.

Not present: David Byers, NEIT; and, Adam Raschka, Charter.

#### 2. *Approval of Minutes of June 18, 2019 (Council vote needed)*

**The Council voted unanimously to approve the minutes.**

#### 3. Council membership

The Council welcomed new members Brad Paul and Janet Zander, and continuing members Adam Raschka, David Byers, and Vanessa Johnson. The Council bid farewell to Jean Pauk and Bob Kellerman, and thanked them for their years of service.

#### 4. USF Assessments, Jenna Schmidt

The new assessment rates were approved on October 11, 2019, and effective October 1, 2019. The assessment rates are based on the anticipated fiscal year 2020 (July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020) spend for all appropriations in the USF including USF programs at the UW, the

Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Administration, and the Public Service Commission.

This year the Commission chose to assess for its internal operating budget (which was approved by the Council at its June 2019 meeting) of \$4.2 million instead of for its appropriation (\$5.9 million). The Commission was able to do this because the ending fund balance was sufficient to meet the broadband transfer requirement of \$2 million.

Council members representing the industry briefly discussed the ongoing challenge with the assessments because the contribution base is shrinking resulting in higher assessments.

#### 5. 1-AC-251 status

There was a public hearing for this proposed rule change in June 2019. There are no other updates at this time.

#### 6. TEPP: statistics and outreach program, Billy Mauldin

The vouchers processed this year for TEPP are consistent with expectations. Currently, the program has processed 1,006 vouchers, and anticipates between 2,800-3,000 vouchers total for the state fiscal year.

During the June 2019 Council meeting, a question was raised about how many vouchers are issued versus redeemed. Billy reported that going back to 2008, 98% of issued vouchers were redeemed, and during fiscal year 2020 (July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020), the redemption rate is 83%. The redemption percentage by disability category was: Deafblind, 57%; Deaf, 84%; Hard of Hearing, 91%, Low Vision, 83%; Mobility, 84%; and, Speech Impaired, 60%.

The TEPP Outreach Program is up-and-running. This year the Outreach Program is administered at the Commission; in previous years, the program was administered through an agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Each of the eight Independent Living Centers receives \$43,850 for the Outreach Program and reports quarterly on their efforts.

#### 7. TEPP Subcommittee Report, Pam Holmes

The TEPP Subcommittee met at the Ultratec offices on December 4, 2019 to discuss the TEPP equipment list, which was last updated in 2014. The meeting was attended by a wide range of policy makers, accessible technology experts, representatives from the ILCs, and vendors.

The Subcommittee conducted a detailed review of the list, and incorporated updated, current technology, as well as affirming that TEPP management reserves the right to modify the list. During the review process, emphasis was placed on the intent for the equipment which is to provide access to telecommunications (distance communications), not face-to-face communications.

Additional changes include: more products for Deaf and Low Vision customers, and a list of products that are not approved was added to the list. This includes personal sound amplification products (PSAPs); listening devices which amplify sound but are not used for distance communication, sometimes known as over-the-counter hearing aids.

**The Council voted unanimously to approve the list.**

**8. Telemedicine Equipment Grant Program: next grant round**

The next round of Telemedicine Grants will be announced soon, with an application due date of March 12, 2020. The funding levels will be the same as in previous years (\$1 million over two years).

Wisconsin Act 56 authorized the use of Medicaid to pay for care using telehealth. The hope is that this will increase the number of applications to the grant program. Additional efforts to get the word out about the grant agreement were solicited from the Council. Council members without conflicts of interest were invited to participate in the review process.

**9. Lifeline**

**a. National Verifier**

Wisconsin is transitioning to the National Verifier (NV) per the federal 2016 Lifeline Modernization Act. Currently, Wisconsin uses a state-based system called CALER. The transition process includes the Wisconsin DHS and Department of Revenue (DOR). Commission staff are coordinating agreement negotiations between these agencies and the Universal Services Administrative Corporation (operating on behalf of the Federal Communications Commission).

There are two phases to the transition: the soft launch (effective December 16, 2019) and the full launch (March 2020). During the soft launch period, carriers will be able to use either CALER or the NV. After the full launch, only the NV will be used for determining eligibility.

For customers, this means they will no longer have to work with the telephone company to determine eligibility, but enrollment will still be handled by the carriers. Once the eligibility is determined, NV will hold the customer's eligibility for 90 days. Carriers will need to verify a customer's eligibility during enrollment in Lifeline.

In some states the transition from soft to full launch resulted in customers losing their Lifeline service. The Commission's efforts are intended to avoid any loss of service for customers in Wisconsin.

Until the Wisconsin CALER databases are fully connected, the NV will consult federal databases administering qualifying programs, but will not verify income. Income verification is a CALER function administered by the DOR. For that reason, the customers in Wisconsin most at-risk for losing their Lifeline benefit are those who are income-verified (at or below 135% of the Federal

Poverty Guidelines). The income verification will be functional once the NV is fully connected to the Wisconsin system.

For carriers, customer releases of information will no longer be stored locally, and fees will no longer need to be paid to DHS for ongoing system maintenance of CALER.

b. December 1 changes: minimum service standards, federal support levels

Minimum Service Standards

Effective December 1, carriers must meet minimum service standards to receive their maximum federal Lifeline reimbursement. Fixed wireless providers may request exceptions to this rule.

Reduced Federal Support Levels

The federal Lifeline reimbursement is changing from \$9.25/customer to \$7.25/customer for voice only customers and for those providers not meeting the minimum service standards.

In Wisconsin, we are analyzing the overall impact on the USF budget. The state will not automatically increase the amount of state support to compensate for reduced reimbursement amounts from the federal Lifeline.

The Commission recently developed a formalized process that ensures carriers are in compliance with federal and state rules before authorizing changes in the state Lifeline reimbursement rate.

The Commission historically encouraged carriers to use the combination of federal and state Lifeline support to reduce the customer's phone bill to \$15. If a carrier maximizes reimbursement from state and federal Lifeline programs, a customer's bill may be more than \$15. The Commission does not regulate these rates.

10. Nonprofit Access Grants: new grant agreement and reporting procedures

The Commission recently standardized the grant agreements for all grant programs, including the USF Nonprofit Access Grant program. The changes for grantees include new reporting requirements. Commission staff will set up site visits for grantees in Spring 2020.

11. Subcommittees: membership and meetings

The USFC discussed its subcommittees to be sure membership was accurate. The subcommittees have been standing committees for a number of years, and may include members of the stakeholder community. Per Council suggestion, Holly will add term expirations to the subcommittee list.

The subcommittees are:

- Rules: Jim Jermain, AT&T (chair); Scott Bohler, Frontier; Ted Hankins, CenturyLink; David Byers, Upper Midwest Wireless; Jerry Schneider, Marquette-Adams Co-op; and,

Adam Raschka, Charter Communications. Jean Pauk stated she would be willing to participate as a non-Council member.

- TEPP: Pam Holmes, Ultratec (chair); and, Michele Ahlman, ClearSounds;
- Low Income: Vanessa Johnson (chair); Brad Paul, WisCAP; Janet Zander, GWAAR; and, Shari Brunes, Access to Independence.

David Mortimer, Hospital Sisters Health System, is willing to serve where needed.

## 12. Future meetings

### a. Discussion of other USF programs as they pertain to Council

The Council discussed the relationship between the Council and other state agencies who receive USF monies. Although these agencies can't be represented on the Council, it would be helpful to understand how the bulk of the USF monies are being used. The Council suggested Holly reach out to the Department of Public Instruction to request an overview of one of their USF programs at the next Council meeting.

## 13. Other Business, Jenna Schmidt

### a. Solix contract RFP

Solix is the fund administrator for the USF. They are responsible, on the revenue side, for collecting all of the assessments for all USF programs. On the expenditure side they work on the Commission's USF programs. The current contract between Solix and the Commission expires on June 30, 2020 and the Commission has an option to extend through June 30, 2021.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) process takes about one year. Commission staff will start the RFP process in the spring of 2020, awarding a contract no later than the spring of 2021. Jean served on the evaluation committee during the last RFP process and the Commission will potentially need a Council member to serve on the upcoming evaluation committee.

### b. Audit of USF by the Legislative Audit Bureau

The USF audit is a statutorily-required financial statement audit of the fund. It was completed in August 2019. The Commission received an unmodified audit opinion. The auditors worked with Solix, the Commission, the Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Administration, and the University of Wisconsin in the audit process. Auditors communicated observations to DOA for the TEACH program and billing. DOA is working on suggested corrective actions identified in the audit. There were no recommendations from the auditors for the Commission internal processes.

## 14. Adjourn