From: Melnykovych, Andrew (PSC)

To:

Subject: your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 10:33:10 AM

Dear Mr. FitzGerald:

Thank you for your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund.

Your comments in the above-referenced matter have been received and will be placed into the case file for the Commission's consideration.

As you noted, the case number in this matter is 2016-00059. It would be helpful if you would please refer to it in any further correspondence.

The application and other documents in this case are available at http://psc.kv.gov/PSC WebNet/ViewCaseFilings.aspx?case=2016-00059

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

RECEIVED

By Kentucky PSC at 1:18 pm, Mar 16, 2016

Andrew Melnykovych

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Andrew.Melnykovych@ky.gov

From:

Sent: Monday, February 22, 2016 4:24 PM To: PSC - Public Information Officer

Cc:

Subject: AARP Comments Re: 2016-00059

Greetings.

Please find attached the written comments of AARP regarding the proposed Interim Order in the Kentucky Universal Service Fund case. Thanks in advance.

Tom FitzGerald Kentucky Resources Council

on behalf of AARP

Humanity did not descend as angelic beings into this world. Nor are we aliens who colonized Earth. We evolved here, one among many species, across millions of years, and exist as one organic miracle linked

to others. The natural environment we treat with such unnecessary ignorance and recklessness was our cradle and nursery, our school, and remains our one and only home. To its special conditions we are intimately adapted in every one of the bodily fibers and biochemical transactions that gives us life.

E.O. Wilson, The Future of Life



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of And Inquiry into the State Universal Service Fund Case No. 2016-00059

Comments of AARP

AARP welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the Kentucky Public Service Commission ("PSC" or "Commission") regarding the Commission's investigation into the current and future funding, distribution, and administration of the Kentucky Universal Service Fund ("KUSF").¹ AARP has approximately 460,000 members in Kentucky, many of whom are living on fixed incomes. The affordability of essential services such as basic voice service and broadband access to the Internet are among the top concerns of AARP's Kentucky members. AARP fully supports state policies that further the goal of making available affordable voice and broadband service for eligible low-income households, including efforts to stabilize and improve the funding and administration of the KUSF.

In its Order initiating this proceeding, the Commission identified two types of issues.

The first deals the pressing issue of the pending insolvency of the KUSF. The Commission

Real Possibilities

¹ In the Matter of An Inquiry into the State Universal Service Fund, Case No. 2016-00059, Order, February 1, 2016 ("Order").

proposes to address this by either: 1) increasing the per-line charge used to fund the KUSF or 2) reducing the per-line support paid to carriers who offer Lifeline service.² The second category of issues are longer-term considerations, including "the need for continuing the KUSF; future funding levels of KUSF; the possibility of reducing the amount of KUSF support on a permanent basis; past and projected distributions from the KUSF; and, determining the future practices for requesting and receiving support from the KUSF."³The short- and longer-term questions are not independent, however. In order to evaluate the best course for addressing the immediate problem, it would nonetheless be beneficial for the Commission to come to a better understanding of what has caused the KUSF to go from its nearly \$11 million surplus, as of mid-2012, to the near-deficit state that exists today. If the trend that has caused increased demands on the fund is something that can be reversed through corrective actions by providers, then the Commission should be considering an interim response. However, if the growth in demands on the fund is legitimate and relatively permanent in nature, then a longer-term change is a more appropriate response.

Because of the KUSF's rapidly deteriorating financial condition, the Commission has concluded, however, that it does not have the luxury of waiting for a more complete record before deciding how to protect the KUSF from insolvency. AARP agrees that this is a paramount objective, so that low-income households do not suffer the disruption of losing KUSF Lifeline support in its entirely while the underlying problems and future needs are explored. The Order mentions the possibility of a \$0.06 increase in the per-line KUSF charge (from \$0.08 to \$0.14) or a reduction of the Lifeline benefit by approximately \$1.50 (from \$3.50 to approximately \$2.00). In AARP's view, the objective should be to maintain

² *Id.* at 5.

³ *Id.* at 6.

affordable subscribership for as many customers as possible. It seems more probable that a \$1.50 increase in cost will deter a low-income customer from continuing telephone service than that a six (6) cent increase will cause attrition among lower-income customers who nonetheless are above the Lifeline income threshold. AARP considers it important that an adequate level of Lifeline support, comprised of federal and state funding, be maintained for eligible households. AARP is concerned that if KUSF per-line support were to be cut (according to the Commission's Order, by as much as \$1.50 per month), it would be challenging to restore it to the existing level. Increasing the per-line charge by just a few cents over a broader base of customers would seem less disruptive, especially if there is an expectation that the increase can be rescinded once longer-term issues with the fund have been addressed. AARP is not insensitive to the fact that even a modest increase in KUSF per-line charges affects a large number of customers; however, given the decline in wireless expense over the period of 2004 to 2014, when the customer charge was last changed, the modest change needed to preserve the Kentucky Lifeline program at current levels is the preferred option.

In the event that the Commission does not increase the per-line charge in order to preserve the program support at current levels, AARP believes that a combination of cost-cutting and fund-increasing methods would be preferable to attempting to close the gap entirely from the cost side of the equation. In addition, as proposed earlier, whatever approach is taken to restore fiscal stability in the short-term should be subject to subsequent revision based on the Commission's findings in the later phase of the proceeding.

Getting back to the longer-term issues, it is clearly important to understand what is

driving the increased enrollment that has in turn increased the annual support requirements for the KUSF. It is possible that the increased demands on the fund arise from the fact that ETCs have been successful at enrolling previously unserved but legitimately eligible households. If so, this should be considered a positive development, as it means that a greater portion of the intended beneficiaries of the Lifeline program are being reached. On the other hand, it could result from the enrollment of ineligible customers, despite the adoption of reforms in the Lifeline program in 2012, by both the FCC, in its Lifeline Reform Order,⁴ and by the PSC.⁵ The joint efforts of state and federal regulators are key to improving accountability while promoting full participation in the Lifeline program.⁶

Many of the reforms from 2012 were "focused on changes to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in the Lifeline program by, among other things: setting a savings target; creating a National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) to prevent multiple carriers from receiving support for the same household; and confirming a one-per-household rule

⁴ Lifeline and Link-Up Reform and Modernization et at., Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Nos. 11-42 et al., 27 FCC Rcd 6656 (2012) ("Lifeline Reform Order"). ⁵ Case No. 2012-00146, Lifeline Reform (Ky. PSC May 1, 2012). In particular, the Commission "1) adopted the FCC's annual audit and recertification process; 2) adopted the eligibility requirement of household income at or below 135 percent of the of the federal poverty level; 3) adopted the application process in the Lifeline Reform Order; and 4) required

ETCs to follow the FCC's rules and direction for annual audits." Order at 3-4.

⁶ Commenting on federal-state joint efforts in this area, the FCC has noted: "In addition to working with the Commission on universal service policy initiatives on the Joint Board, many states administer their own low-income programs designed to ensure that their residents have affordable access to telephone service and connections. These activities provide the states the opportunity and flexibility to develop new and innovative ways to make the Lifeline program more effective and efficient, and ultimately bring recommendations to the Commission for the implementation of improvements on a national scale. As we continue to modernize the Lifeline program, we deeply value the input of the states as we, among other reforms, seek to streamline the Lifeline administrative process and enhance the program." In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket Nos. 11-42 et al. 09-197, and 10-90, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Order on Reconsideration, Second Report and Order, and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 30 FCC Rcd 7818, 7820 (2015) "2015 Further Lifeline Reform Order").

applicable to all consumers and Lifeline providers in the program."⁷ The FCC also started to lay the foundation for the expansion of Lifeline service to support broadband access, a goal that it continues to work toward achieving.⁸ In a 2015 Order in its Lifeline and Link-Up Reform and Modernization proceeding, the FCC acknowledged that, while there has been considerable improvement in program administration as a result of the 2012 reforms, additional improvements could still be made. Thus, the FCC has proposed to adopt further reforms, including revised documentation retention requirements and minimum service standards for any provider that receives a Lifeline subsidy. Importantly, the FCC concluded:

We also seek to focus our efforts on targeting funding to those low-income consumers who really need it while at the same time shifting the burden of determining consumer eligibility for Lifeline support from the provider. We further seek to leverage efficiencies from other existing federal programs and expand our outreach efforts.⁹

Better outreach, leveraging the efficiencies of other available programs, and the requirement that providers take responsibility for ensuring the eligibility of the consumers they sign up are key reforms that would also benefit administration of state Lifeline funds.

As part of its investigation, the PSC might also find useful answers by comparing the experience in Kentucky with experience nationwide since 2012. A recent report by the Government Accountability Office¹⁰ notes that where for many years, the lion's share of disbursements went to wireline carriers, since 2008 there has been a steady increase in the share that go to wireless ETCs: "Since 2008, the Lifeline program shifted from wireline

⁷ *Id.* at 7824.

⁸ *Id.* at 7821

⁹ Id

¹⁰ See GAO, Telecommunications: FCC Should Evaluate the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Lifeline Program, GAO-15-335 (March 2015) (GAO March 2015 Report)

ETCs, which received at least 82 percent of Lifeline disbursements in 2008, to wireless ETCs, which received 85 percent of disbursements in the third quarter of 2014," and prepaid wireless service is a major contributor to that shift. This is consistent with the Commission's observation that the growth in demands on KUSF since 2012 coincides with the authorization of numerous additional prepaid wireless service providers as ETCs.

The GAO also notes that because the transition to wireless service removed the connection between Lifeline service and a physical address, this change increased the likelihood that a household could receive more than one Lifeline-supported service. There have been efforts to address this problem. In particular, the Universal Service Administrative Company ("USAC") "undertook an in-depth data validation process to identify and remove duplicate subscribers, and reported that it eliminated 2.2 million duplicate subscribers and yielded savings of over \$260 million from 2011 through 2013."11 However, monitoring and enforcement of the rules that restrict Lifeline support to a single phone service per household remains a challenge.

However, the Kentucky experience does appear to be different from the national trend for the period following the adoption of Lifeline reforms in 2012. Nationally, according to the FCC, "in the time since the reforms were adopted, the size of the Lifeline program has declined steadily. In 2012, the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), the Administrator of the Fund, disbursed approximately \$2.2 billion in Lifeline support payments compared to approximately \$1.6 billion in Lifeline support payments in 2014."12

It would be helpful to identify why the Kentucky experience has diverged from the

GAO March 2015 Report at 26.2015 Further Lifeline Reform Order, 30 FCC Rcd at 7821.

experience nationwide. Is the entry of wireless resellers as ETCs occurring somewhat later

than in the nation as a whole or are these providers being particularly effective in

outreach? Is there any reason to believe that the reforms adopted in 2012 – including the

requirement that there be only one subsidized line per household and that inactive lines be

eliminated – are not being appropriately verified and enforced by Kentucky ETCs?

AARP is hopeful that the submissions of various ETCs will help to clarify what is

happening and encourages the Commission to use this proceeding to investigate ETC

practices as well as other factors that may be causing increased demand on the Lifeline

program. AARP strongly urges that any reforms in the KUSF preserve the core objectives of

supporting universal service among the low-income population. AARP reserves the right to

supplement this filing based on information arising in the course of the Commission's

investigation.

Respectfully submitted,

James T. Kimbrough

Jim Kindongh

President

AARP Kentucky

February 22, 2016

From: PSC - Public Information Officer

To: "John Duerr"

Subject: your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 12:52:46 PM

Dear Mr. Duerr:

Thank you for your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund.

Your comments in the above-referenced matter have been received and will be placed into the case file for the Commission's consideration.

For your future reference, the case number in this matter is 2016-00059. It would be helpful if you would please refer to it in any further correspondence.

The application and other documents in this case are available at http://psc.kv.gov/PSC WebNet/ViewCaseFilings.aspx?case=2016-00059

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

RECEIVED

By Kentucky PSC at 1:09 pm, Mar 16, 2016

Andrew Melnykovych

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Andrew.Melnykovych@ky.gov

From: John Duerr

Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 12:49 PM

To: PSC - Public Information Officer **Subject:** FREE PHONE DEAL

I THINK IT'S WRONG THAT I HAVE TO PAY FOR OTHER PEOPLE TO GET A FREE PHONE THIS IS BULLSHIT. LET THEM GET A JOB LIKE I HAD TO IF THE WANT A PHONE

John Duerr

Crush Bearings and Drives - Louisville Division 4324 Bishop Lane Louisville, KY 40218 From: Melnykovych, Andrew (PSC)

To: "Joseph Hamilton"

Subject: your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 10:31:01 AM

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Thank you for your comments in case number 2016-00059 - an investigation into the Kentucky Universal Service Fund.

Your comments in the above-referenced matter have been received and will be placed into the case file for the Commission's consideration.

For your future reference, the case number in this matter is 2016-00059. It would be helpful if you would please refer to it in any further correspondence.

The application and other documents in this case are available at http://psc.ky.gov/PSC WebNet/ViewCaseFilings.aspx?case=2016-00059

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

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----Original Message-----

From: Joseph Hamilton

Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 6:47 AM

To: Melnykovych, Andrew (PSC)

Subject: Phone program for low income customers

RECEIVED

By Kentucky PSC at 1:20 pm, Mar 16, 2016

Having a cell phone is a luxury not a right. Instead of handing out multiple cell phones assist those in need with a landline. I work extremely hard for my \$.06 cents and I speak for a lot of people when I say we are tired of people in charge giving away everything. Yes, it's a small amount but where does it end? Stop giving away hard working people's money.

Joe Hamilton

Joe Hamilton

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*Windward Wireless LLC Windward Wireless LLC 3245 Peachtree Pkwy, Suite D Suwanee, GA 30024 *e-Tel, LLC dba e-Tel Murray, LLC e-Tel, LLC dba e-Tel Murray, LLC 607 Broadway Paducah, KY 42001 *Sunset Fiber, LLC Sunset Fiber, LLC 333 Fraley Avenue Duffield, VA 24244 *TracFone Wireless, Inc. TracFone Wireless, Inc. 9700 NW 112th Avenue Miami, FL 33178

*Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative 405 Main Street P. O. Box 399 West Liberty, KY 41472-0399 *Rural Cellular Corporation dba Verizon Wireless Rural Cellular Corporation dba Verizon Wireless One Verizon Way Mailcode VC53S475 Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

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*NextGen Communications, Inc. NextGen Communications, Inc. 275 West Street, Suite 400 Annapolis, MD 21401 *BellSouth Telecommunications, LLC db BellSouth Telecommunications, LLC dba AT&T 601 W Chestnut Street 4th Floor East Louisville, KY 40203 *Velocity Networks of Kentucky, Inc. Velocity Networks of Kentucky, Inc. 120 East Third Street Russellville, KY 42276

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*Windstream NuVox, LLC Windstream NuVox, LLC 4001 Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212 *PAETEC Communications, LLC PAETEC Communications, LLC 4001 N Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212

*Talk America, LLC Talk America, LLC 4001 N Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212 *Windstream NTI, LLC Windstream NTI, LLC 4001 Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212

*Network Telephone, LLC Network Telephone, LLC 4001 N Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212 *Windstream Kentucky East, LLC Windstream Kentucky East, LLC 4001 Rodney Parham Road Little Rock, AR 72212

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