

BEFORE THE FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In re: 2025 State certification under 47 C.F.R. §54.313 and §54.314, annual reporting requirements for high-cost recipients and certification of support for eligible telecommunications carriers.

DOCKET NO. 20240097-TP
ORDER NO. PSC-2024-0436-FOF-TP
ISSUED: October 1, 2024

The following Commissioners participated in the disposition of this matter:

MIKE LA ROSA, Chairman
ART GRAHAM
GARY F. CLARK
ANDREW GILES FAY
GABRIELLA PASSIDOMO

ORDER AUTHORIZING 2025 UNIVERSAL SERVICE CERTIFICATIONS

BY THE COMMISSION:

Background

The eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) in Florida seeking our approval for annual certification in order to receive high-cost support began filing affidavits to initiate the process on June 11, 2024. Those ETCs that are subject to our annual certification review include: Bright House Networks Information Services (Florida); LLC, CenturyLink of Florida, Inc.; Consolidated Communications of Florida Company; Frontier Florida LLC; ITS Telecommunications Systems; LLC d/b/a Blue Stream Fiber; Northeast Florida Telephone Company d/b/a NEFCOM, Quincy Telephone Company d/b/a TDS Telecom, Smart City Telecommunications LLC d/b/a Smart City Telecom, Windstream Communications, LLC; and Windstream Florida, LLC.

One of the primary principles of universal service support as described in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Telecom Act) is for consumers in all regions to have reasonably comparable access to telecommunications and information services at reasonably comparable rates.¹ The federal universal service high-cost program is designed to help ensure that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to modern communications networks capable of providing voice and broadband service, both fixed and mobile, at rates that

¹ 47 U.S.C. §254(b)(3) (2024)

are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas.² The program supports the goal of universal service by allowing ETCs to recover some of the costs of service provision in high-cost areas from the federal Universal Service Fund. Carriers can be designated as ETCs in Florida by the Commission or the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

In order for carriers to receive federal universal service high-cost support, state commissions must annually certify to the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) and to the FCC that each carrier complies with the requirements of Section 254(e) of the Telecom Act by using high-cost support “only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which the support is intended.”³ Certification will be filed online by the Commission through USAC’s online portal. Immediately following online certification, the USAC website will automatically generate a letter that may be submitted electronically to the FCC to satisfy the submission requirements of 47 C.F.R. §54.314(c). In order for a carrier to be eligible for high-cost universal service support for all of calendar year 2025, we must submit the certification by October 1, 2024.⁴

We have jurisdiction pursuant to 47 C.F.R. §54.313 and §54.314, as well as Chapter 364, F.S.

Analysis and Decision

All Florida ETCs that are seeking high-cost support have filed affidavits with the Commission attesting that the high-cost funds received for the preceding calendar year were used, and funds for the upcoming calendar year will be used only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which the support is intended. Additionally, each company has filed FCC Form 481 with USAC. Form 481 includes information such as emergency operation capability, FCC pricing standards comparability for voice and broadband service, holding company and affiliate brand details, and tribal lands service and outreach. Based on previous years’ data and projected changes in support, we estimate that approximately \$18 million in high-cost support may be received by these Florida ETCs in 2025.⁵

We have reviewed the affidavits and submissions made by each carrier to the Commission and to USAC. Each of the Florida ETCs receiving high-cost support has attested that all federal high-cost support provided to them within Florida was used in the preceding calendar year and will be used in the coming calendar year only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which the support is intended.⁶

² FCC, “Universal Service for High Cost Areas - Connect America Fund,” updated August 21, 2024, <https://www.fcc.gov/general/universal-service-high-cost-areas-connect-america-fund>, accessed August 23, 2024.

³ 47 C.F.R §54.314(a) (2024)

⁴ 47 C.F.R §54.314(d) (2024)

⁵ This estimate was obtained using data from the USAC high-cost funding data disbursement search tool.

⁶ 47 C.F.R §54.314(a) (2024)

Based on the foregoing, it is

ORDERED by the Florida Public Service Commission that we shall certify to USAC and to the FCC, through online certification with the USAC and by electronic filing of a USAC-generated certification letter with the FCC, that Bright House Networks Information Services (Florida), LLC; CenturyLink of Florida, Inc.; Consolidated Communications of Florida Company; Frontier Florida LLC; ITS Telecommunications Systems, LLC d/b/a Blue Stream Fiber; Northeast Florida Telephone Company d/b/a NEFCOM; Quincy Telephone Company d/b/a TDS Telecom; Smart City Telecommunications LLC d/b/a Smart City Telecom; Windstream Communications, LLC; and Windstream Florida, LLC are eligible to receive federal high-cost support, that they have used the federal high cost support in the preceding calendar year, and they will use federal high-cost support they receive in the coming calendar year only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities for which the support is intended. It is further

ORDERED by the Florida Public Service Commission that this docket should be closed upon issuance of a Final Order.

By ORDER of the Florida Public Service Commission this 1st day of October, 2024.



ADAM J. TEITZMAN
Commission Clerk
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Copies furnished: A copy of this document is provided to the parties of record at the time of issuance and, if applicable, interested persons.

NOTICE OF FURTHER PROCEEDINGS OR JUDICIAL REVIEW

The Florida Public Service Commission is required by Section 120.569(1), Florida Statutes, to notify parties of any administrative hearing or judicial review of Commission orders that is available under Sections 120.57 or 120.68, Florida Statutes, as well as the procedures and time limits that apply. This notice should not be construed to mean all requests for an administrative hearing or judicial review will be granted or result in the relief sought.

Any party adversely affected by the Commission's final action in this matter may request:

- 1) reconsideration of the decision by filing a motion for reconsideration with the Office of Commission Clerk, 2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850, within fifteen (15) days of the issuance of this order in the form prescribed by Rule 25-22.060, Florida Administrative Code; or
- 2) judicial review by the Florida Supreme Court in the case of an electric, gas or telephone utility or the First District Court of Appeal in the case of a water and/or wastewater utility by filing a notice of appeal with the Office of Commission Clerk, and filing a copy of the notice of appeal and the filing fee with the appropriate court. This filing must be completed within thirty (30) days after the issuance of this order, pursuant to Rule 9.110, Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure. The notice of appeal must be in the form specified in Rule 9.900(a), Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure.