

Media Advisory

Contact: Chris Puyear
christopher.puyear@mt.gov
(C): 406-431-2499

April 3, 2017

PSC Explores Changes in Federal Telecom Programs

What: Hearing- improvements to Universal Service Fund programs in Montana.
When: Friday, April 6, 1:30 pm
Where: PSC Business Office, 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT 59601
Livestream: <http://psc.mt.gov/video.asp>

The Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) will hold a public hearing and roundtable discussion this Friday, to investigate potential problems inherent in federal telecom subsidy programs, and to explore a wide range of proposed solutions.

Each October, the PSC is charged with re-certifying eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) to receive approximately \$100 million in federal subsidies to pay the extra cost of building broadband and voice networks in high cost areas of the state -- predominately rural and tribal communities. The money comes from the Federal Communication Commission's Universal Service Fund, which has long faced allegations of waste and inefficiency.

Friday's hearing is part of a Commission initiated process aimed at identifying potential reforms to Universal Service Fund programs at the state and federal level.

Commissioner Roger Koopman, R-Bozeman, said he's hoping for a robust discussion about the best way to serve rural and low income customers in Montana. "Legitimate questions exist as to whether the current High-Cost and Lifeline programs are truly in the long-term best interest of those that they purport to serve," he said. "By reducing the incentive to innovate and obscuring the true cost of service these federal subsidies may be doing more harm than good."

The results of the investigation may inform potential action by the Commission, including reform to Commission practices and regulations, as well as recommendations to Congress, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Montana Legislature.

Members of the public are invited to attend and provide oral comment at the meeting.

###

For PSC updates please follow us on twitter [@MT_PSC](https://twitter.com/MT_PSC), and "like" our Facebook page [Montana PSC](https://www.facebook.com/MontanaPSC)