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H.B. No. 2667

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

1 AN ACT

2 relating to universal service fund assistance to high cost rural
3 areas and the uniform charge that funds the universal service fund.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

5 SECTION 1. Section 56.001, Utilities Code, is amended by
6 adding Subdivision (3) to read as follows:

7 (3) "High cost rural area" means:

8 (A) an area:

9 (i) receiving support under Section
10 56.021(1) on December 31, 2020; and

11 (ii) served by a telecommunications
12 provider that is subject to rate regulation under Chapter 53; or

13 (B) an area:

14 (i) receiving support under the Texas High
15 Cost Universal Service Plan (16 T.A.C. Section 26.403) or the Small
16 and Rural Incumbent Local Exchange Company Universal Service Plan
17 (16 T.A.C. Section 26.404); and

18 (ii) not excluded by commission rule based
19 on the number of telecommunications providers serving the exchange,
20 the population density in the exchange, and the number of customers
21 served per route mile of plant in service used to provide basic
22 local telecommunications service.

23 SECTION 2. Section 56.022, Utilities Code, is amended to
24 read as follows:

1 Sec. 56.022. UNIFORM CHARGE. (a) The universal service
2 fund is funded by a statewide uniform charge payable by each
3 telecommunications provider and each provider of Voice over
4 Internet Protocol service that has access to the customer base.

5 (b) A telecommunications provider or provider of Voice over
6 Internet Protocol service shall pay the charge in accordance with
7 procedures approved by the commission.

8 (c) The uniform charge is on services and at rates the
9 commission determines. In establishing the charge and the services
10 to which the charge will apply, the commission may not:

11 (1) grant an unreasonable preference or advantage to a
12 telecommunications provider or a provider of Voice over Internet
13 Protocol service;

14 (2) assess the charge on pay telephone service; [~~or~~]

15 (3) subject a telecommunications provider or a
16 provider of Voice over Internet Protocol service to unreasonable
17 prejudice or disadvantage; or

18 (4) assess the charge in a manner that is not
19 technology-neutral or that grants an unreasonable preference based
20 on technology.

21 SECTION 3. Sections 56.024(a) and (b), Utilities Code, are
22 amended to read as follows:

23 (a) The commission may require a telecommunications
24 provider or a provider of Voice over Internet Protocol service to
25 provide a report or information necessary to assess contributions
26 and disbursements to the universal service fund.

27 (b) A report or information the commission requires a

1 telecommunications provider or a provider of Voice over Internet
2 Protocol service to provide under Subsection (a) is confidential
3 and not subject to disclosure under Chapter 552, Government Code.

4 SECTION 4. Not later than December 31, 2021, the Public
5 Utility Commission of Texas shall initiate the rulemaking to adopt
6 the rules required by Section 56.001, Utilities Code, as amended by
7 this Act.

8 SECTION 5. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
9 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
10 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
11 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
12 Act takes effect September 1, 2021.