S-0831.1

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**SENATE BILL 5505**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Chapman, Short, and Wellman

AN ACT Relating to the state universal communications services program; amending RCW 80.36.300, 80.36.630, 80.36.650, 80.36.660, 80.36.670, 80.36.680, 80.36.690, and 80.36.700; providing expiration dates; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.300 and 1985 c 450 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

The legislature declares it is the policy of the state to:

(1) Preserve affordable universal telecommunications service;

(2) Maintain and advance the efficiency and availability of telecommunications service;

(3) ((~~Ensure that customers pay only reasonable charges for telecommunications service;~~

~~(4) Ensure that rates for noncompetitive telecommunications services do not subsidize the competitive ventures of regulated telecommunications companies;~~

~~(5)~~)) Upgrade and maintain the state telecommunications infrastructure, including middle and last mile;

(4) Invest in public safety including, but not limited to, 911, enhanced 911, and next-generation 911 service;

(5) Ensure that all areas of the state are at or above the state's broadband goals as described in RCW 43.330.536; and

(6) Promote diversity in the supply of telecommunications services and products in telecommunications markets throughout the state((~~; and~~

~~(6) Permit flexible regulation of competitive telecommunications companies and services~~)).

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.630 and 2019 c 365 s 11 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The definitions in this section apply throughout this section and RCW 80.36.650 through 80.36.690 and 80.36.610 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Basic residential service" means those services set out in 47 C.F.R. Sec. 54.101(a) (2011), as it existed on May 13, 2019, and mandatory extended area service approved by the commission.

(b) "Basic telecommunications services" means the following services:

(i) Single-party service;

(ii) Voice grade access to the public switched network;

(iii) Support for local usage;

(iv) Dual tone multifrequency signaling (touch-tone);

(v) Access to emergency services (911);

(vi) Access to operator services;

(vii) Access to interexchange services;

(viii) Access to directory assistance; and

(ix) Toll limitation services.

(c) "Broadband service" means any service providing advanced telecommunications capability, including internet access and access to high quality voice, data, graphics, or video.

(d) "Communications provider" means a provider of communications services that assigns a working telephone number to a final consumer for intrastate wireline or wireless communications services or interconnected voice over internet protocol service, and includes local exchange carriers.

(e) "Communications services" includes telecommunications services and information services and any combination thereof.

(f) "Incumbent local exchange carrier" has the same meaning as set forth in 47 U.S.C. Sec. 251(h).

(g) "Incumbent public network" means the network established by incumbent local exchange carriers for the delivery of communications services to customers that is used by communications providers for origination or termination of communications services by or to customers.

(h) "Interconnected voice over internet protocol service" means an interconnected voice over internet protocol service that: (i) Enables real-time, two-way voice communications; (ii) requires a broadband connection from the user's location; (iii) requires internet protocol-compatible customer premises equipment; and (iv) permits users generally to receive calls that originate on the public network and to terminate calls to the public network.

(i) "Program" means the state universal communications services program created in RCW 80.36.650.

(j) "Telecommunications" has the same meaning as defined in 47 U.S.C. Sec. 153(43).

(k) "Telecommunications act of 1996" means the telecommunications act of 1996 (P.L. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56).

(2) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.650 and 2019 c 365 s 12 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A state universal communications services program is established. The program is established ((~~to protect public safety and welfare~~)) under the authority of the state to regulate telecommunications under Article XII, section 19 of the state Constitution. The program is established to advance the development of statewide telecommunications infrastructure that is capable of supporting applications such as public safety, telemedicine, services for persons with special needs, distance learning, public library services, access to internet providers, and voice services to ensure access to 911 services. The purpose of the program is to support continued provision of basic telecommunications services under rates, terms, and conditions established by the commission and the provision, enhancement, and maintenance of broadband services, recognizing that, historically, the incumbent public network functions to provide all communications services including, but not limited to, voice and broadband services.

(2) Under the program, eligible communications providers may receive distributions from the universal communications services account created in RCW 80.36.690 in exchange for the affirmative agreement to provide continued telecommunications services under the rates, terms, and conditions established by the commission under this chapter, and broadband services, for the period covered by the distribution. The commission must implement and administer the program under terms and conditions established in RCW 80.36.630 through 80.36.690. Expenditures for the program may not exceed five million dollars per fiscal year; provided, however, that if less than five million dollars is expended in any fiscal year, the unexpended portion must be carried over to subsequent fiscal years and, unless fully expended, must be available for program expenditures in such subsequent fiscal years in addition to the five million dollars allotted for each of those subsequent fiscal years.

(3) Funds from the universal communications services account may be used for the following purposes:

(a) To provide and upgrade services in areas that do not meet the state's speed goals as defined in RCW 43.330.536;

(b) To ensure the reliability and integrity of the emergency telecommunications systems;

(c) For the maintenance of existing telecommunications infrastructure; and

(d) For other purposes defined by the commission.

(4) Funds may not be used to overbuild existing infrastructure in areas that receive federal funding and exceeds the states speed goals as defined in RCW 43.330.536.

(5) A communications provider is eligible to receive distributions from the account if:

(a)(i) The communications provider is((~~: (A) An~~)) an incumbent local exchange carrier serving fewer than ((~~forty thousand~~)) 20,000 access lines in the state((~~; or (B) a radio communications service company providing wireless two-way voice communications service and broadband services to less than the equivalent of forty thousand access lines in the state~~)). For purposes of determining the access line threshold in this subsection, the access lines or equivalents of all wireline affiliates must be counted as a single threshold, if the lines or equivalents are located in Washington;

(ii) The communications provider has adopted a plan to provide, enhance, or maintain broadband services in its service area; ((~~and~~))

(iii) In order to protect public health, safety, and welfare, the communications provider utilizes battery back-up of the communications provider's system to ensure time-limited access to emergency services in the event of no access to an electrical power source;

(iv) The communications provider is eligible to participate and does participate in a low-income, service affordability program such as the federal lifeline program;

(v) The communications provider provides access to the state's emergency services programs such as 911, enhanced 911, and next-generation 911; and

(vi) The communications provider meets any other requirements established by the commission pertaining to the provision of communications services, including basic telecommunications services; or

(b) The communications provider demonstrates to the commission that the communications provider is able to provide the same or comparable services at the same or similar service quality standards at a lower price; and: (i) Will provide communications services to all customers in the exchange or exchanges in which it will provide service; and (ii) submits to the commission's regulation of its service as if it were the incumbent local exchange company serving the exchange or exchanges for which it seeks distribution from the account.

((~~(4)~~)) (6)(a) Distributions to eligible communications providers are based on criteria established by the commission.

(b) If the program does not have sufficient funds to fully fund the distribution formula set out in (a) of this subsection, distributions must be reduced on a pro rata basis using the amounts calculated for that year's program support as the basis of the pro rata calculations.

(c) To receive a distribution under the program, an eligible communications provider must affirmatively consent to continue providing communications services to its customers under rates, terms, and conditions established by the commission pursuant to this chapter for the period covered by the distribution.

((~~(5)~~)) (7) The program is funded from amounts deposited by the legislature in the universal communications services account established in RCW 80.36.690. The commission must operate the program within amounts appropriated for this purpose and deposited in the account.

((~~(6)~~)) (8) The commission must periodically review the accounts and records of any communications provider that receives distributions under the program to ensure compliance with the program and monitor the providers' use of the funds.

((~~(7) The commission must establish an advisory board, consisting of a reasonable balance of representatives from different types of stakeholders, including but not limited to communications providers and consumers, to advise the commission on any rules and policies governing the operation of the program.~~

~~(8)~~)) (9) The program terminates on June 30, ((~~2024~~)) 2027, and no distributions may be made after that date.

((~~(9)~~)) (10) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.660 and 2019 c 365 s 13 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) To implement the program, the commission must adopt rules for the following purposes:

(a) Operation of the program, including criteria for: Eligibility for distributions; use of the funds; identification of any reports or data that must be filed with the commission, including, but not limited to, how a communication provider used the distributed funds; and the communications provider's infrastructure;

(b) Operation of the universal communications services account established in RCW 80.36.690;

(c) Establishment of the criteria used to calculate distributions; and

(d) Readoption, amendment, or repeal of any existing rules adopted pursuant to RCW 80.36.610 as necessary to be consistent with RCW 80.36.630 through 80.36.690 and 80.36.610.

(2) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.670 and 2019 c 365 s 14 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) In addition to any other penalties prescribed by law, the commission may impose penalties for failure to make or delays in making or filing any reports required by the commission for administration of the program. In addition, the commission may recover amounts determined to have been improperly distributed under RCW 80.36.650. For the purposes of this section, the provisions of RCW 80.04.380 through 80.04.405, inclusive, apply to all companies that receive support from the universal communications services account created in RCW 80.36.690.

(2) Any action taken under this section must be taken only after providing the affected communications provider with notice and an opportunity for a hearing, unless otherwise provided by law.

(3) Any amounts recovered under this section must be deposited in the universal communications services account created in RCW 80.36.690.

(4) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.680 and 2019 c 365 s 15 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The commission may delegate to the commission secretary or other staff the authority to resolve disputes and make other administrative decisions necessary to the administration and supervision of the program consistent with the relevant statutes and commission rules.

(2) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.690 and 2019 c 365 s 16 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The universal communications services account is created in the custody of the state treasurer. Revenues to the account consist of moneys deposited in the account by the legislature and any penalties or other recoveries received pursuant to RCW 80.36.670. Expenditures from the account may be used only for the purposes of the universal communications services program established in RCW 80.36.650 and commission expenses related to implementation and administration of the provisions of RCW 80.36.630 through 80.36.690 and section 212, chapter 8, Laws of 2013 2nd sp. sess. Only the secretary of the commission or the secretary's designee may authorize expenditures from the account. The account is subject to allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW, but an appropriation is not required for expenditures.

(2) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

**Sec.**  RCW 80.36.700 and 2019 c 365 s 17 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The universal communications services program established in RCW 80.36.630 through 80.36.690 terminates on June 30, 2024.

(2) This section expires July 1, ((~~2025~~)) 2027.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately.

**--- END ---**