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Chairman Mark Sidran
Washington Utilities and transportation Commission
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Chairman Sidran,

I write you today with concerns regarding what I believe to be a misrepresentation of the issues of emergency service response in the Stehekin valley, located in northern Chelan County.

Stehekin is a remote community adjacent to the Lake Chelan National Park. It is a unique community, surrounded by the national park but privately owned. There are 43 homes in the valley, approximately 100 citizens live in the valley year round; this would include year round park service employees. Access to Stehekin is limited to air or water transportation, with an average emergency response time of 90 minutes.

The community has emergency medical, search and rescue and fire volunteer teams. We are in the process of training several more residents for emergency response to potential disasters, rescues and criminal issues.

The Commission has been led to believe emergency response to Stehekin is lacking due to no phone service or a limited phone service. The Commission has also been led to believe a hard line phone service is essential to the Stehekin community. This is a misrepresentation of the service that is currently being provided to the community.

I have been employed with the Chelan County Sheriff's office for over 30 years and through out my career have provided varying levels of service to the Stehekin community. I was elected as Sheriff in 2002 and began a series of community meetings in Stehekin to provide an effective and efficient emergency response to the residents of the valley. From these meetings we have greatly enhanced the emergency service delivery to the residents, and we will continue to upgrade the system in the years to come.

One access to emergency services would be the Enhanced 911 system. E911 provides the capability to route end-users calls to an emergency service agency or the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), by dialing the three digit universal emergency telephone number 911. E911 rules seek to improve the effectiveness and reliability of 911 services by providing emergency services personnel with location information that will enable them to dispatch assistance to callers much more quickly.

In the case of Stehekin residents, they have been given the ability to call directly to the PSAP via radio, as well as the use of a satellite phone service. The ability to identify the caller's location at this point is non existent, but we have developed a comprehensive emergency management plan that has identified all residents in Stehekin and key locations for response to any given emergency. We also have the ability to program the radio to give the PSAP a trailer that will identify the radio caller as a Stehekin resident.

As the chief executive law enforcement officer of the county I determine whether E911 service will be used in a particular geographic area and how each end office switch will access the PSAP. Therefore, the public agency is the primary decision-maker for trunk group design, size and routing. Several years ago the Chelan County Sheriff determined that the most effective and efficient way to provide emergency services to Stehekin is via the existing system. I have agreed with this determination and will continue to utilize the system we have in place.

To expend federal, local and state funds to provide a hard line phone (E911) service to Stehekin will not make the current system any more effective and certainly not more efficient. More importantly to raise the fee to citizens, who do not want the service, is not appropriate.

The creation of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness fulfills the fundamental role of government to secure the public's safety and security. As Sheriff I am dedicated to minimizing a continuum of risks to citizens – from risks to personal safety from crime or naturally occurring events such as severe weather, floods or forest fires, to threats to national security from terrorist activity. I have fulfilled my duty to provide a service to the citizens of Stehekin and will continue to secure the public's safety to the best of my ability.

I understand the WUTC does not have the ability to deny an application for license in this case, but I believe the Commission should have objective clear information about the needs. The Commission must not be led to believe that a hard line phone service in Stehekin is essential to its survival. If the license was issued to Westgate Communications, LLC d/b/a Wea-Tel and predicated on erroneous information, I believe there is the possibility that fraud exists and the issuance should be reviewed for validity.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Michael T. Harum