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March 3, 2001

Carole Washburn
Executive Secretary
Washington Utilities and
Transportation Commission
1300 South Evergreen Park Drive SW
Olympia, Washington 98504-7250

Re: Docket No. UT-003074
Chapter 480-122 WAC – Washington Telephone Assistance Program

Attention: Kirsten Russell

Dear Ms. Washburn:

Qwest Corporation has minimal comments in response to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission's Opportunity to Submit Written Comments and Propose Alternative Rule Language, dated April 17, 2001. These comments relate to Chapter 480-120 WAC Telecommunications – Washington Telephone Assistance Program ("WTAP"). Pursuant to the Commission's request, a copy of these comments is being sent by electronic mail.

Qwest generally concurs with the changes and deletions proposed by Staff. Qwest supports the removal of excessive language throughout Chapter 480-120, which duplicates the Department of Social and Health Services' ("DSHS") rules (WAC 388-31-010 through 388-31-035), as recommended by the Commission Staff in its March 23, 2001 Notice.

Qwest generally supports Commission Staff's recommendation for WAC 480-122-010. However, Qwest respectfully requests that the word residential be included for clarification purposes into subset three(3). Qwest proposes that WAC 480-122-101 be amended as follows:

(3) "Washington telephone assistance program" means the program of local exchange residential service discounts administered by the department.

Further, Qwest disagrees with the proposed language of WAC 480-122-020.

The Commission staff proposed language is as follows:

Every eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) must offer the telephone assistance rates and discounts in accordance with RCW 80.36.410 through 475. Every non-ETC local exchange company must offer the telephone assistance rates and discounts in accordance with RCW 80.36.410 through 475 when 100 or more of its access lines are subscribed to for residential service.

Qwest respectfully requests that WAC 480-120-020 apply to all carriers, Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (“ILEC’s”), Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (“CLEC’s”) and resellers, not just those with eligible telecommunications carrier (“ETC”) status or those non-ETC local exchange companies with 100 or more of its access lines subscribed to for residential service. As noted in Qwest’s January 30, 2001 comments, every local exchange company should be required to offer telephone assistance rates and discounts in accordance with RCW 80.36.410 through 475.

Qwest commends the Commission in its support of granting ETC status to LEC’s that choose to obtain such designation as being in the public interest. That some carriers are not designated with ETC status is not a restriction of the market but as a result of the carrier’s business decisions. Consequently, Qwest concurs with DSHS’s comments dated January 30, 2001, which state that “ETC designation is desirable from the customer’s standpoint as it ensures that the carrier can at a minimum provide the services cited in the universal service order.”

However, should the Commission determine that ETC status is inappropriate for all carriers of residential services, Qwest would respectfully ask the commission to eliminate the 100 or more access line threshold. It is unclear how the Commission intends the 100 or more lines to be measured and/or reported; by wire center, by geographic area or by state. Yet, implementing such tracking systems could be very costly. If all carriers providing residential service were to obtain ETC status, thus contributing to the WTAP, tracking requirements would become inconsequential.

Additionally, Qwest concurs with Public Counsel’s comments dated February 2, 2001, which “questions whether it is legally appropriate for the Commission to establish a threshold level of (any) kind, whereby only certain local exchange carriers...would be required to make a WTAP offering.”

Ultimately, it is inappropriate to preclude low income subscribers from the right to obtain telephone service from a provider of their choice when such choices exists.

Finally, Qwest respectfully requests that WAC 480-122-080 also be modified with new language. The existing language is unclear and can be read to imply that only a portion of the federal access charge, the unwaived portion, be shown on the ratepayer’s bill. Modifying Qwest’s existing billing system to reflect the existing language would have effects on our expenses. To modify this section, Qwest proposes that WAC 480-122-080 be amended as follows:

Local exchange companies shall maintain their accounting records so that expenses associated with the telephone assistance program can be separately identified. The unwaived portion of the federal end user access charge shall be shown on the ratepayer’s bill.

If you have questions concerning any of these comments, I can be reached at 206-345-5921.

Sincerely,

Lisa Espinosa

Enclosures