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RURAL WIRELESS CARRIERS SEEK LONG TERM SOLUTION FOR HIGH COST UNIVERSAL SERVICE

Today, the Rural Telecommunications Group, Inc. (RTG)¹ submitted a list of high cost universal service principles with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission), asking the Commission to consider the role that small, rural wireless carriers play in the provision of vital telecommunications services in rural America. As the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service considers long-term reform and numerous associations representing differing industry segments weigh in with their own views, RTG thought that the universal service views of small, rural wireless carriers that provide services in underserved areas should be equally considered. “The wireless industry, contrary to conventional wisdom, does not speak in one monolithic voice,” notes Jerry Wilke, Executive Director of RTG. “Our members have the experience and expertise that comes with serving *and living* in rural America,” he added.

Rural consumers use both wireless and wireline services. The Commission should not limit high cost universal service to just one technology. By focusing on rural providers who can demonstrably show where their high cost funds are being used, the Commission can target and limit the high cost fund. By using carriers’ costs rather than reverse auctions, the Commission can target the fund without risking catastrophic damage to rural communities. “The availability of telecommunications choices for rural consumers is at stake here,” stated Mike Higgins, Jr., President of RTG. “As the Commission and Joint Board move forward on high cost reform, the unique role of genuine rural wireless carriers cannot be overlooked.”

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¹ RTG is a Section 501(c)(6) trade association dedicated to promoting wireless opportunities for rural telecommunications companies. RTG’s members are small businesses serving or seeking to serve secondary, tertiary, and rural markets. RTG’s members are comprised of both independent wireless carriers and wireless carriers that are affiliated with rural telephone companies.