



*Case No: GNR-T-17-05*

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## **Commission to hold public workshops regarding future of Idaho Universal Service Fund**

**BOISE (Jan. 5, 2018)** – The Idaho Public Utilities Commission has scheduled two public workshops regarding the future of the Idaho Universal Service Fund (IUSF).

Set for Jan. 17 and Feb. 28 in Boise, the workshops will allow any interested party the opportunity to provide insight and commentary on the sustainability of the IUSF amid the evolving telecommunications landscape.

The fund was established through the Idaho Telecommunications Act of 1988 in order to ensure that all Idahoans have access to local telephone service at reasonable rates.

It accomplishes this by taking revenue collected via a surcharge assessed on all land-line users and long-distance call minutes, and distributing that revenue to telecommunications carriers that meet certain eligibility requirements.

The fund has allowed rural telephone companies to keep their rates at no more than 25 percent above rates in more urban areas, where the cost of providing service is less expensive.

In recent years, however, the fund's revenue has been insufficient to cover distributions.

As a result, in September 2017, the Commission raised the monthly surcharge to 25 cents for each residential phone line, up from 12 cents. For each business phone line, the surcharge increased from 20 cents to 44 cents per month. The cost for each minute of a long-distance call also increased, from a half-cent per minute to 0.9 cents per minute.

The changes are expected to allow the fund to meet its obligations for the current fiscal year, but concerns about its viability remain.

To address the issue, the Commission opened a generic docket to facilitate communication with the general public, phone company representatives and other stakeholders, with the goal of developing a sustainable approach for the fund in an industry in which land lines are increasingly being replaced with new technology such as cell phones and Voice over Internet Protocol.

The workshops are the first step in this process. Each is scheduled to begin at 10 am in the Commission's Hearing Room at 472 W. Washington St. in downtown Boise.

At the Jan. 17 meeting, Commission staff plan to summarize the issues related to the IUSF's viability as well as potential solutions and outcomes, with the goal of facilitating an informal, preliminary discussion of the issues. Stakeholders interested in formally stating their position will be encouraged to create position papers so that the positions can be analyzed prior to and during the second workshop.

Any interested party can either attend or call in on a toll-free line. To call in, dial (888) 706-6468 and enter participant code 4435939 when prompted.

To access documents related to this case, go to the Commission website, [www.puc.idaho.gov](http://www.puc.idaho.gov). Under "Telecom," click on "Open Cases" and scroll down to case number GNR-T-17-05.