

MATT HUNTER
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL
IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
PO BOX 83720
BOISE, IDAHO 83720-0074
(208) 334-0318
IDAHO BAR NO. 10655

RECEIVED
2020 NOV -9 PM 1:52
IDAHO PUBLIC
UTILITIES COMMISSION

Street Address for Express Mail:
11331 W CHINDEN BLVD, BLDG 8, SUITE 201-A
BOISE, ID 83714

Attorney for the Commission Staff

BEFORE THE IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

IN THE MATTER OF Q LINK WIRELESS,)
LLC'S APPLICATION TO EXPAND ITS) **CASE NO. QLW-T-20-01**
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS)
CARRIER SERVICE AREA) **COMMENTS OF THE**
) **COMMISSION STAFF**
)

STAFF OF the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, by and through its Attorney of record, Matt Hunter, Deputy Attorney General, submits the following comments.

BACKGROUND

On August 21, 2020, Q LINK WIRELESS, LLC ("Q LINK" or "Company") applied to expand its Eligible Telecommunications Carrier ("ETC") service area to provide Lifeline service to additional qualifying Idaho households. Q LINK also requests to participate in the Idaho Telecommunications Service Assistance Program ("ITSAP"). The Lifeline program is intended to provide more affordable telecommunications service benefits to eligible low-income customers through the federal Universal Service Fund ("USF") and ITSAP. Idaho participates in the residential Lifeline program pursuant to *Idaho Code* § 56-901. See Order No. 21713.

The Application

Q LINK is a Delaware limited liability company with its principal place of business in Dania, Florida. The Company provides wireless Lifeline service to eligible Idaho Lifeline

customers utilizing the Sprint Spectrum L.P. (Sprint”) and T-Mobile USA, Inc. (“T-Mobile”) wireless networks.

Q LINK was designated a Lifeline-only ETC by the Commission in Order No. 32995, dated March 13, 2014. *See* Case No. QLW-T-13-01. In that Order, Q LINK was restricted to providing federal Lifeline service to the wire centers listed in Exhibit 6 of the Company’s Application.

In this Application, the Company seeks to expand its ETC designated service area as described in Exhibit 2 of the Application. Sprint and T-Mobile provide wireless coverage in the proposed service area. The Company also requests authority to participate in the State’s ITSAP program which the Company did not seek in its previous ETC designation application.

Q LINK’s Lifeline Service Offerings

The Company offers two Lifeline plans for qualified customers. One Non-Tribal Lifeline Service Plan and one Lifeline Tribal plan. Exhibit 3. Q LINK allows customers to purchase additional minutes on-line. Q LINK’s plans include a free handset and domestic long-distance service. A detailed description of the Company’s Lifeline plans is attached to the Application as Exhibit 3.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff has reviewed Q LINK’s Application and recommends Commission approval. Staff has conducted an analysis of the Company’s compliance with the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996, FCC regulations and orders, and Commission Order No. 29841.

Public Interest Considerations

Staff typically focuses on two considerations when analyzing whether a common carrier’s ETC Application is in the public interest. First, Staff determines whether the Company contributes to Idaho funds. Second, Staff analyzes whether the Company’s Application raises “cream skimming” concerns.¹

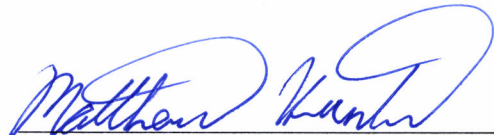
¹ “Cream skimming” occurs when a telecommunications carrier seeks ETC designation for only part of a rural telephone company’s study area, leaving less profitable customers without service.

In the Company's Application, Q LINK confirmed that it has complied with the conditions of its ETC designation and will continue to do so. Application at 3. Since the Company was approved as an ETC in Idaho, the Company has paid into the appropriate Idaho programs, specifically the ITSAP and the 9-1-1 program, and asserts it will comply with any future reporting requirements deemed appropriate for competitive telecommunications providers. Application at 3-4. The Company requests ETC designation everywhere that its underlying carrier provides service. Therefore, there is no risk of "cream skimming." Staff believes Q LINK satisfies the public interest considerations.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on its review of the Company's Application, Staff believes that the Application demonstrates the Company's commitment to fulfill the obligations of a Lifeline-only ETC in Idaho. The Company will provide all universal services supported by the federal USF throughout its service territory, and the Company's Application does not raise public interest concerns. The Commission has designated several other companies statewide ETC status since originally granting Q LINK's ETC designation. *See* Case Nos. SAG-T-19-01 and GLO-T-18-01. Therefore, Staff does not see an issue with expanding the Company's ETC designation to the wire centers listed in Exhibit 2. Currently, the Commission has granted six wireless ETCs access to participate in the State's ITSAP program, so Staff supports allowing Q LINK to participate in the ITSAP program. Staff believes Q LINK's Application to expand its ETC service area is in the public interest and should be approved for the new wire centers listed in Exhibit 2. Staff also supports Q Link's request to participate in the ITSAP.

Respectfully submitted this 9th day of November 2020.



Matt Hunter
Deputy Attorney General

Technical Staff: Daniel Klein

i:umisc/comments/sagt19.1ejdk comments

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT I HAVE THIS 9TH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2020, SERVED THE FOREGOING **COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION STAFF**, IN CASE NO. QLW-T-20-01, BY E-MAILING A COPY THEREOF, TO THE FOLLOWING:

LANCE JM STEINHART
LANCE JM STEINHART PC
1725 WINDWARD CONOURSE
STE 150
ALPHARETTA GA 30005
E-MAIL: lsteinhart@telecomcounsel.com



SECRETARY