



August 9, 2012

The Honorable John Carona
Chairman, Senate Committee on Business and Commerce
P. O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

Re: Comments for 8/14/2012 hearing on the interim charge related to the state's telecommunications service discounts program

Dear Chairman Carona,

The Texas Library Association welcomes the opportunity to submit comments regarding the value and benefit of the state's telecommunications discount program. This state program was established in 1995 to help anchor educational institutions, including libraries and schools, maintain a world class network for learning. The program remains an essential component of the state's information and telecommunications infrastructure. Without the discount program, many institutions would be unable to meet their current level of service.

As the Senate Business and Commerce Committee undertakes its interim work to review this program, I ask the Committee to consider the tremendous benefit of this program in deploying online learning opportunities to the people of Texas through our public libraries.

- There are over 550 public library systems in Texas and an additional 300 branch libraries. These libraries offer open and robust internet services to people of all ages within the communities they serve.
- 64% of libraries in Texas report that they are the only source of free Internet access in their communities. As the vast majority of libraries in Texas serve small and rural communities, libraries serve as critical points of access to technology, technology instruction, and electronic resources. Moreover, many informational resources and online journals and research materials are only available electronically.
- 93% of Texas public libraries provide substantial workforce training and employment services by making available to citizens access and use of online employment resources, including job searches, creating resumes, and submitting employment applications.

According to the Public Utility Commission (PUC), participating companies can recoup the full cost of the services provided by charging up to 105-110% for the telecommunications service, so providers make a small profit off of the discount. A 2006 PUC report valued the discount program at almost \$100 million per year. Anchor educational institutions, such as libraries and schools, rely on the saving afforded by this program to maintain robust Internet connectivity and to continue providing needed instructional technologies for the public. Harsh budget conditions constrain our educational and healthcare institutions, and there is no means to replace the value of these discounts.

For these reasons, the library community greatly supports this discount program. Every day, librarians see the enormous impact of bringing open and equitable access to the digital marketplace of ideas, learning, and innovation to the people of Texas. The state discount program is an integral component in the provision of this telecommunications infrastructure. We ask you for your continued support of this program.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gloria Meraz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

Gloria Meraz
Director of Communications