

SECRETARY'S RECORD, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

BEFORE THE NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Nebraska) Application No. NUSF-57.03
Public Service Commission, on)
its own motion, seeking to)
administer the Nebraska) GRANTED
Telehealth Program: Nebraska)
Prairie Ventures; September 24,)
2020 request for consideration)
and approval of support.) Entered: December 8, 2020

BY THE COMMISSION:

On September 24, 2020, Nebraska Prairie Health Ventures filed a request on behalf of eight Nebraska rural critical access hospitals for additional funding for their Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network (NSTN) T1 telehealth connections. These connections historically received the majority of their funding through the federal Rural Health Care Telecommunications Program and have been approved for secondary funding through the Nebraska Telehealth Program since the program's inception in 2005. In 2018, the NSTN had begun phasing out the old T1 connections and healthcare providers replaced their telehealth connections with fiber lines in other regional network connections interconnected in the state. Notice of the application appeared in the Daily Record, Omaha, Nebraska on October 23, 2020. No protests or petitions seeking intervention were filed; accordingly, the Commission processes this request pursuant to its Rule of Modified Procedure.

O P I N I O N A N D F I N D I N G S

In 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an order making modifications to the Rural Health Care Telecommunications Program which made changes to the filing requirements for documentation of rates. The NSTN Telehealth connections were based on tariffed rates filed by the service providers, in the cases subject to PHV's current request, the rates were Windstream's tariffed rates. The rates were originally contracted services that transitioned to month-to-month service agreements. Tariffed rate documentation had previously been accepted to support rates, however, in 2018, USAC, the administrator for the FCC Rural Health Program began selecting funding requests for additional documentation for substantiation of rates.

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Prairie Health Ventures stated of the funding requests that were selected for additional documentation all the same backup documentation was filed, yet some were approved for funding and some were denied. The healthcare providers worked with their service provider, in this case Windstream, to file appeals, but the appeals were subsequently denied.

Prairie Health Ventures further stated that it is the filer for all eight of these rural critical access hospitals and all other current existing connections receive federal funding for the lines under the FCC's newer Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF). The former NSTN lines that are included in this request for funding were selected for rate review under the old Rural Health Care Telecommunications Program in the final year these old T1 lines were in place. The hospitals included in this request are very small critical access hospitals and the balances that remain due to the denial of federal funding are unexpected and place a burden on the hospitals in an already difficult time.

On behalf of the health care providers, Prairie Health Ventures seeks additional Telehealth support in the amount of \$59,781.04, which is broken down as follows for the listed sites:

Facility Name	City	Amount
Community Medical - Falls City	Falls City	\$8,306.57
Fillmore County Hospital	Geneva	\$6,893.07
Henderson Health Care Services	Henderson	\$7,453.97
Jefferson Community Health Care	Fairbury	\$5,392.79
Nemaha County Hospital	Auburn	\$7,733.64
Pawnee County Memorial Hospital	Pawnee City	\$8,414.70
Boone County Health	Albion	\$8,395.20
Annie Jeffrey Memorial Health Center	Osceola	\$7,191.10

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In consideration of the information provided by Prairie Health Ventures, we find the request to be reasonable and should be granted. The health care providers shall be eligible for a combined \$59,781.04 in Telehealth support. The service provider shall provide credits to the health care provider's accounts in the amounts listed above and provide a copy of the invoice showing the credits have been placed for funding reimbursement.




O R D E R

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED by the Nebraska Public Service Commission the September 24, 2020 request filed by Prairie Health Ventures be, and it is hereby, approved as filed.

ENTERED AND MADE EFFECTIVE at Lincoln, Nebraska this 8th day of December, 2020.

NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

COMMISSIONERS CONCURRING:


Chair

ATTEST:


Executive Director