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NEWS RELEASE

PSC Approves \$1 Pole Attachment Fees to Spur Broadband in Unserved Areas

December 15, 2020 (ATLANTA) – The Georgia Public Service Commission approved a policy for broadband expansion pursuant to House Bill 244 today that requires Electric Membership Cooperatives to charge a simple \$1-per-year fee for entities to attach utility service to poles in areas "unserved" by broadband. The \$1 per year fee would be set for six years.

Commissioner Tricia Pridemore added a successful motion to set pole rates in areas currently served by broadband to \$27.71 per pole per year. This represents an "at cost" fee to cover service and upkeep of the poles.

"Served" and "unserved" areas are determined by the Georgia Broadband Initiative map published by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Also in today's decision, Commission Chairman Chuck Eaton made a successful motion to require EMCs to report back to the PSC every two years with total revenue made from pole attachments and the total number of attachments to their poles. It also requires telecom companies to report their total investment in Georgia's broadband expansion and their total number of broadband customers.

Commissioner Lauren "Bubba" McDonald was supported by all of his colleagues in a motion to ensure speedy repairs and added safety to poles that have been damaged in storms or otherwise.

"Creating a \$1 attachment rate in unserved areas is a major step forward for Georgia," said Tim Echols, who authored the motion that passed today. "EMCs are partnering with other companies to both create new broadband networks as well as work with existing cable companies to bring internet to unserved areas – something all of our elected officials are concerned about."

For Commissioner Jason Shaw, this is a personal issue.

"As someone who lives in unserved rural Georgia, this issue is very important to me," he said. "I see, first hand, children who must travel long distances to find sufficient wifi just to finish their homework. PSC staff worked very hard on this difficult issue. I hope providers will take advantage of this \$1 deal to push broadband into rural areas."

Pole attachment fees for regulated utilities, such as Georgia Power, are set by the Federal Communications Commission. EMC pole attachment rates have previously remained unregulated, subject only to joint-use agreements between the individual EMCs and those entities wishing to attach utilities to EMC poles.

Fee rates have been a point of contention between telecom companies and EMCs for many years. As the vital need for broadband service in rural areas has begun to grow, the issue of pole attachment fees has become a major issue in Georgia.

To resolve the dispute, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 244 – also called “the Georgia Broadband Opportunity Act” – in the 2020 session. House Bill 244 charged the Commission with determining the rates, fees, terms, conditions and specifications in any pole attachment agreement entered into by a communications service provider and an EMC on and after July 1, 2021.

Hearings on the pole attachment rate issue were held by the PSC on Nov. 17 through Nov. 20.

The Georgia Public Service Commission, which has a long history of setting utility rates, is a five-member constitutional body that exercises its authority and influence to ensure consumers receive safe, reliable and reasonably-priced telecommunications, electric and natural gas service from financially viable and technically competent companies.

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