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Oregon PUC Suggests Limit to Lifeline 'Non-Usage' Waiver

If the FCC decides to extend the waiver of its "non-usage" rule, which its Wireline Competition Bureau first waived last spring "to assist Lifeline program participants potentially affected by the coronavirus and community efforts to slow its spread" (TR Daily, March 30), it should "consider reinstating the requirement with an extended number of days to cure, e.g., a total of 30, 45 or 60 days, etc. rather than the 15-day cure period, as it finds appropriate," the Oregon Public Utility Commission said in a ex parte letter to the FCC dated yesterday.

The Oregon PUC added. "This approach is an extension within reason that still minimizes potential public health risk yet conserves program funds on a service not being used altogether."

It said that a PUC staff data request to eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) "does not indicate a significant number of customers are returning to use the supported service after 45 days. Consequently, Oregon Commission Staff is concerned about the resulting expenditure of public funds on a service that is not being used in this state, and potentially not being used on a nationwide basis. In addition, Oregon Commission Staff continues to receive customer reports that the ETC-provided smartphones used to access the Lifeline-supported service by customers that would be subject to de-enrollment without the waiver have not been in use for extended periods due to a variety of reasons including, but not limited to loss, theft or defect."

The non-usage rule bars Lifeline support for customers who don't use the service in a given month. — Lynn Stanton, lynn.stanton@wolterskluwer.com