



# Office of Consumer Advocate

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2004

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## Office of Consumer Advocate Expresses Concerns About Distributions of Universal Service Funds to Telephone Customers

CHEYENNE, WYOMING –

Today, the Wyoming Office of Consumer Advocate (OCA) filed a protest with the Wyoming Public Service Commission expressing concerns about whether universal service funds are being properly distributed in support of high cost telephone services throughout Wyoming. In filed documents, the OCA estimates that nearly 40,000 telephone customers throughout Wyoming may be entitled to more than \$500,000 in funds that have been collected specifically for the support of the higher cost local telephone services provided throughout Wyoming. The OCA estimates that certain higher cost customers have paid more than \$13 too much in the first half of 2004, and believes those customers should receive the money that has been earmarked to help keep telephone rates affordable in all areas of the state.

“Wyoming law established the universal service fund to assist telecommunications consumers located in areas of Wyoming with relatively high local service rates,” stated Christopher Petrie, Senior Attorney for the OCA. “We are asking the Public Service Commission, as administrator of the fund, to revise the calculations used to determine how this money is distributed and to assure that the money is received by the proper customers.”

The OCA is asking for the Commission to reconsider its preliminary computation of the distribution of the funds for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2004. The OCA also expressed its concern that the Commission has not enforced an order requiring a re-computation of the amount of support received by customers for the first six months of 2004, a period in which the OCA believes that customers received less support than they should have. “We are urging the Commission to enforce a decision that it has already made, and make sure that customers enjoy the full benefits of the Wyoming universal service fund provisions,” Petrie continued. “We believe that this can be accomplished without any further assessment to Wyoming customers because there is a sufficient surplus currently in the fund.”

The Wyoming universal service fund was established as part of the rewrite of Wyoming telecommunications laws in 1995. Established in an attempt to keep rates affordable while the telecommunications industry moved to competition, it is used to supplement bills paid by customers to assure that essential telecommunications services remain affordable. It is funded by a monthly assessment on Wyoming telecommunications bills.