

Vote **YES** on HB2616 (Thomsen and Fields)

Modernization of the Oklahoma Universal Service Fund (OUSF)

Every citizen in Oklahoma will be positively impacted by the changes proposed in HB2616. From elderly citizens receiving health care via telemedicine in rural areas to job seekers uses Internet Access at their local library and students accessing online curriculum. The proposed changes in HB 2616 for the Oklahoma Universal Services Fund administered by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) are the result of a collaborative effort of Oklahoma’s schools, libraries, health care providers and service providers to modernize the Special Universal Services Fund. Established in 1997, the fund provides affordable access to the Internet and information services for Oklahoma’s students, library patrons and patients across the state. The changes proposed will implement procedures to modernize the program for advances in technology that have occurred since 1997, ease the administrative burden, control costs, increase efficiency and transparency, and provide regulatory certainty to this valuable fund.

Who is eligible for these funds? Common education, career technology school districts, libraries, not for profit hospitals, not for profit mental health, counties, Federally Qualified Health Centers and Corrections. Eligible entities for funds are not changed in HB 2616.

Current Law	HB 2616
<p>Attempts at Reform: The OCC has rulemaking proceedings every year on the OUSF. Problems of inconsistency continue with constant change in rules, forms & procedures. The beneficiaries have had significant additions to staff to try to manage the volume of affidavits, data requests, and other requests from OCC.</p> <p>Reimbursement in filing process up to 18 months <u>after service begins</u>. Telecom carriers are stuck with unpaid bills and end users with bills they can’t pay if OUSF funding not adequate. Lengthy approval process 24 months or longer.</p> <p>Competitive bidding for services by rulemaking.</p> <p>Commission rulemaking required all beneficiaries to apply for federal funds by July 1, 2016.</p> <p>OUSF funded by telecommunications carriers (wireless and wireline) of Oklahoma. No appropriated dollars involved.</p> <p>Telemedicine is 100% funding of one line as necessary for the telemedicine equipment, regardless of rural or urban.</p> <p>Schools & Libraries 100% funding of T-1 or equivalent to each building with classrooms or to library.</p> <p>Career & Technology Center School Districts currently receive OUSF support for high school instruction but are not specifically listed in the current statute.</p>	<p>Reform of the fund and its modernization: HB 2616 moves the fund <u>from a litigation</u> based system <u>to an administrative process</u> which is key to creating efficiency in the fund such as reducing OCC staff time and telecommunications carrier time spent on litigation of funding amounts.</p> <p>Approval of eligible services and credit amounts for the beneficiary <u>before service begins</u> (no unpaid bills for the telecommunications carrier or the beneficiary). Significant cost savings due to predictable funding process.</p> <p>Competitive bidding for services required by statute. Support will be provided based on the lowest reasonable cost qualifying bid.</p> <p>All beneficiaries will apply for federal funds upon implementation of the Act. <u>Federal funds received by beneficiaries will continue to offset state costs.</u></p> <p>OUSF funded by Contributing Providers of Oklahoma consistent with FCC decisions. No appropriated dollars.</p> <p>Telemedicine will be funded by federal programs first and remainder by OUSF. For entities unable to participate in federal programs the health care entity must competitively bid their services and support will be limited to the lowest reasonable cost qualifying bid.</p> <p>Schools & Libraries also funded by OUSF after federal funding. Schools for bandwidth as recommended by State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA); Libraries for bandwidth recommended by federal technology standards.</p> <p>Career & Tech Center school districts that provide high school instruction are specifically listed as beneficiaries of the funds for clarification to OCC staff in HB 2616.</p>
<p>HB 2616 is supported by a collaborative of urban and rural telecommunications companies, schools, and health care entities including: Oklahoma Hospital Association, Oklahoma Primary Care Association, Telehealth Alliance of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Technology Association (School Technology Directors)</p>	