

OKLAHOMA
CORPORATION COMMISSION
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News from Commission Chairman Dana Murphy

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SAVING MONEY, SAVING SERVICE

What has become a very large fee placed on many Oklahomans' phone bill is headed for extinction, thanks to an order proposed by Oklahoma Corporation Commission Chairman Dana Murphy that received unanimous Commission approval today.

The order requires the gradual phase-out of the Oklahoma High Cost Fund (OHCF). This fee is placed on the bills of Oklahomans who still have traditional land-line service that includes intrastate long distance. It was designed to ensure adequate rural telephone service at reasonable rates by companies with fewer than 15 thousand customers.

Chairman Murphy says the OHCF has served a critical purpose, but times have changed drastically since its creation in 1996.

"When the OHCF was first put into place, land-line phone service was the norm for Oklahomans. But we now live in an age where the land-line customer base is shrinking every day, meaning fewer and fewer Oklahomans have to pay more and more for the OHCF," Murphy explained.

Murphy called today's approval for gradual elimination of the fee a win for both Oklahoma phone customers and rural telephone companies.

"I am a rural Oklahoma girl, and still work on my family's ranch in rural western Oklahoma. I know first-hand how essential it is that rural Oklahomans have the same level of telephone service that is available to those in metro areas," Murphy said. "Because of the drastic changes in telecommunication services and the impact that has had on the OHCF and those who pay it, we need to develop new ways to ensure rural Oklahoma has that service. That's why it's important the OHCF be phased out gradually, as we work with all the stakeholders to develop a more sustainable solution."

Under today's order, the approximate 150 percent surcharge on land-line intrastate long distance service will begin to be reduced in February of 2019. The fee will be completely phased out by February, 2022.

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