

§ 54.316

designated disaggregation zones of support within the carrier's study area.

[66 FR 30089, June 5, 2001, as amended at 66 FR 59727, Nov. 30, 2001]

§ 54.316 Rate comparability review and certification for areas served by non-rural carriers.

(a) *Certification.* Each state will be required annually to review the comparability of residential rates in rural areas of the state served by non-rural incumbent local exchange carriers to urban rates nationwide, and to certify to the Commission and the Administrator as to whether the rates are reasonably comparable, for purposes of section 254(b)(3) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. If a state does not rely on the safe harbor described in paragraph (b) of this section, or certifies that the rates are not reasonably comparable, the state must fully explain its rate comparability analysis and provide data supporting its certification, including but not limited to residential rate data for rural areas within the state served by non-rural incumbent local exchange carriers. If a state certifies that the rates are not reasonably comparable, it must also explain why the rates are not reasonably comparable and explain what action it intends to take to achieve rate comparability.

(b) *Safe harbor.* For the purposes of its certification, a state may presume that the residential rates in rural areas served by non-rural incumbent local exchange carriers are reasonably comparable to urban rates nationwide if the rates are below the nationwide urban rate benchmark. The nationwide urban rate benchmark shall equal the most recent average urban rate plus two weighted standard deviations. The benchmark shall be calculated using the average urban rate and standard deviation shown in the most recent annual *Reference Book of Rates, Price Indices, and Expenditures for Telephone Service* published by the Wireline Competition Bureau. To the extent that a state relies on the safe harbor, the rates that it compares to the nationwide urban rate benchmark shall include the access charges and other mandatory monthly rates included in the rate survey published in the most recent an-

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nual *Reference Book of Rates, Price Indices, and Expenditures for Telephone Service*. The *Reference Book of Rates, Price Indices, and Expenditures for Telephone Service* is available for public inspection at the Commission's Reference Center at 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554 and on the Commission Web site at www.fcc.gov/wcb/iatd/lec.html.

(c) *Definition of "rural area."* For the purposes of this section, a "rural area" is a non-metropolitan county or county equivalent, as defined in the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Revised Standards for Defining Metropolitan Areas in the 1990s and identifiable from the most recent Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) list released by OMB. At a state's discretion, a "rural area" may also include any wire center designated by the state as rural for the purposes of this section. In the event that a state designates a wire center as rural, it must provide an explanation supporting such designation in its certification pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section.

(d) *Schedule for certification.* Annual certifications are required on the schedule set forth in § 54.313(d)(3), beginning October 1, 2004. Certifications due on October 1 of each year shall pertain to rates as of the prior July 1. Certifications filed during the remainder of the schedule set forth in § 54.313(d)(3) shall pertain to the same date as if they had been filed on October 1.

(e) *Effect of failure to certify.* In the event that a state fails to certify, no eligible telecommunications carrier in the state shall receive support pursuant to § 54.309.

[68 FR 69626, Dec. 15, 2003]

Subpart E—Universal Service Support for Low-Income Consumers

§ 54.400 Terms and definitions.

As used in this subpart, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

(a) *Qualifying low-income consumer.* A "qualifying low-income consumer" is a consumer who meets the qualifications for Lifeline, as specified in § 54.409.

(b) *Toll blocking.* "Toll blocking" is a service provided by carriers that lets