

NEWS RELEASE

Office of Commissioner Brandon Presley
MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
NORTHERN DISTRICT

PSC Requests Law Change in 2019 to Allow Electric Cooperatives to Provide High-Speed Internet Service

Commissioners voted unanimously to request the needed legislation to help save rural communities and enhance the rural way of life

Jackson, MS (November 8, 2018) – On Tuesday, the Public Service Commission unanimously issued a resolution requesting state law be changed in the 2019 Legislative Session to allow rural electric cooperatives to provide high-speed internet service. Current Mississippi law prohibits rural electric cooperatives from providing internet service, although no such law exists anywhere else in America. Commissioner Brandon Presley has championed the idea as a means of solving the broadband internet crisis that has plagued rural areas of the state for years. Over the last few months, Presley has held citizen task force meetings in all 33 counties in the northern district of the state in order to make the public aware of the rural internet and cellular service crisis. In June, Presley hosted 46 members of the Mississippi Legislature for a rural internet summit in Hamilton, Alabama to showcase the progress being made by Tombigbee Electric Cooperative which has been nationally recognized as a model for rural America. Hamilton, Alabama is fourteen miles from the Mississippi state line, yet Presley says it might as well be 14,000 miles away because the Alabama efforts are so far ahead of Mississippi. Alabama law has no similar ban on their cooperatives.

“The first electric cooperatives in the nation were formed right here in Mississippi, and they weren’t formed just to sell electricity. They were formed to enhance the quality of life for rural people. While folks in the big cities had lighting and electric appliances, people who lived on farms or in rural areas were still lighting candles and cooking on wood stoves. These industrious people of Mississippi formed America’s first electric cooperatives because they wanted rural people to be able to enter the 20th century. Today, we simply ask for rural Mississippi to be allowed to enter the 21st century,” Presley said.



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The PSC resolution notes that high-speed internet has become a necessity for participating in modern life, education, health care and in the economy. Because of the high cost to serve rural areas, few for-profit companies are willing to invest there. The legislation would allow rural electric cooperatives to fill that void. The concept has been demonstrated across the country.

“We cannot continue to wait on the big telecommunications giants to serve rural people. One of my constituents from rural Lee County, John Henson, was told by an AT&T representative that he would get high-speed internet service at his home in the Blair Community when the day came that he could rent a condominium on the moon. That is unacceptable. Telecom companies unwilling to serve rural areas should not prevent rural people from serving themselves through the cooperatives that they own. The members of rural electric cooperatives are simply asking for the right to do what they did a century ago and take the reins themselves and bring service to rural Mississippi. I hope this resolution makes clear that the Public Service Commission is behind them 100%,” Presley concluded.

Presley noted that the proposal does not request any money from the state, does not bar any other provider from providing service, and is not a mandate. “This is a free market bill plain and simple. We aren’t asking for any money or any monopoly. We are asking for local people to be able to decide their own future. This is one of the most common sense ideas that will ever come before the Mississippi Legislature.”

For more information on this resolution please contact Commissioner Brandon Presley’s office directly at 1-800-637-7722.



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