



April 16, 2019

California Public Utilities Commission
Public Advisor's Office
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Transmit Via Email: public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov

RE: R.11-03-013, iFoster Lifeline Pilot Program Proposal

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing in strong support of the proposed decision to authorize the iFoster Lifeline Pilot Program within the California Lifeline Program. The two-year pilot program would provide a smartphone and monthly cell phone service including unlimited voice, unlimited text, unlimited data, and hotspot capabilities free of charge to up to 33,000 current and former foster youth ages 13 to 26 inclusive across California through a simple eligibility and application process.

Broadband deployment in rural California is one of the most critical missing infrastructure components. Its absence precludes unserved and underserved communities from participating in the 21st Century Economy, puts life and safety at risk, places students behind their urban and suburban peers, and adds significant costs to healthcare and other public services. While RCRC continues to pursue critical partnerships to develop financing opportunities that bring robust, ubiquitous service to all of California, we are proud to support aligned efforts that place the technological tools and resources needed to compete in today's connected world in the hands of California's rural underserved populations. "Speed of commerce" broadband deployment throughout California is critical in order for rural California to effectively compete in today's world.

RCRC is an association of thirty-six rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties. In December 2017, RCRC and its affiliate, National Homebuyers Fund, Inc. (NHF), allocated a total of \$400,000 to support the iFoster 1 Laptop Program in 35 of RCRC's member counties. The one-time contribution provided a laptop to every eligible foster youth and

1215 K Street, Suite 1650, Sacramento, CA 95814 | www.rcrcnet.org | 916.447.4806 | Fax: 916.448.3154

former foster youth aged 16-21 in care within 35 of RCRC's member counties (1,139 individuals).

If approved, the iFoster Lifeline Pilot Program will help advance the bridging of the digital divide facing many California foster youth. Currently, only about 1 in 20 rural foster youth have regular access to technology. This lack of access makes it even more difficult for rural foster youth to navigate academic and career pathways, stay connected to their support network, access the resources they need, and remain safe, thus impeding their ability to transition from foster care into successful and self-sufficient adulthood.

By supporting California foster youth, this program will enable the Commission to achieve several of its identified overarching goals for Lifeline, including lowering barriers for consumers to participate in the program, increasing access for unserved and underserved consumers, and providing scalable solutions to adopt. The pilot will furthermore allow CPUC to test categorical eligibility expansion, the provision of program-funded devices, streamlined application and renewal processes, partnerships with the non-profit sector, and new and innovative consumer engagement strategies.

We urge the Commission to vote in support of the proposed decision to authorize the iFoster Lifeline Pilot Program at the upcoming April 25, 2019 meeting. Thank you for your commitment to our state's foster youth, and your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Norton".

Greg Norton
President & CEO
Rural County Representatives of California