

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

*Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding
Emergency Disaster Relief Program*

Rulemaking 18-03-011
(Filed March 22, 2018)

**OPENING COMMENTS OF THE RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES OF CALIFORNIA
ON PROPOSED DECISION CLOSING RULEMAKING**

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Dated: March 20, 2025

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I. Introduction

Pursuant to Rule 14.3 of the California Public Utilities Commission (“Commission” or “CPUC”) Rules of Practice and Procedure, the Rural County Representatives of California (“RCRC”) submits comments to *Decision Closing Rulemaking 18-03-011*, issued by assigned Commissioner Alice Reynolds on February 28, 2025. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties, and our Board of Directors is comprised of an elected Supervisor from each of our member counties. RCRC was granted party status via a written ruling from Administrative Law Judge Colin Rizzo on November 13, 2019.

II. Discussion

RCRC acknowledges the significant progress made in this proceeding and supports the recognition that a successor proceeding focused on resiliency may be necessary. RCRC supports stronger enforcement and compliance of existing rules—whether through this proceeding, an existing Order Instituting Rulemaking (“OIR”), or future rulemaking. Decisions 20-07-011 and D.21-02-029¹ require the development and procurement of resiliency measures, including a 72-hour minimum backup power supply

¹ The Proposed Decision erroneously references D.21-10-029 on page 2, instead of D.21-02-029 (February 18, 2021), *Decision Adopting Wireline Provider Resiliency Strategies*.

for facilities-based wireless and wireline telecommunications providers. However, implementation remains incomplete.

While D.20-07-011 and D.21-02-029 limit resiliency requirements to Tier 2 and Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts (HFTDs), overall electrical reliability continues to decline. Since these Decisions were first enacted, electrical investor-owned utilities (IOUs) have expanded their risk mitigation strategies beyond the last-resort Public Safety Power Shut-off (PSPS) program. For example, Protective Equipment and Device Settings (PEDS) can also cause outages, without the benefit of advanced warning.

A presumed expansion in the Commission’s Tier 2 and Tier 3 HFTD territory² will likely require telecommunications providers to enhance resiliency strategies in more areas. Simultaneously, proposals to modify Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligations³ could weaken baseline telecommunications resiliency statewide. If customers lose access to basic telephone service due to COLR relief—or are denied future service—those outside Tier 2 or Tier 3 HFTDs may face greater risk of losing emergency communications during power outages. Unlike basic telephone service, which is subject to resiliency and reliability standards, advanced services such as VoIP and wireless lack these safeguards. Additional protections are necessary to ensure continuous access to phone service in these scenarios.

As stated in D.21-02-029, “Providers cannot engage in a race to the bottom: to provide the cheapest and least reliable service possible. The requirements we adopt today safeguard against the perils of a deregulated communications marketplace by ensuring a minimum level of service for those communities with the fewest alternatives.”⁴ This Decision highlights the importance of maintaining baseline service standards, particularly in communities with limited alternatives. Given the ongoing policy changes under consideration, a holistic approach to telecommunications resiliency is necessary to prevent service degradation and ensure equitable access to reliable communications infrastructure.

For the foregoing reasons, we request the Proposed Decision’s Conclusions of Law be amended as follows:

2. Those matters identified by the parties as outstanding and within the jurisdiction of the Commission ~~may~~ **shall** be considered in a future rulemaking proceeding or in another current proceeding, where appropriate, **such as R.22-03-016**.

² While the CPUC maintains its own fire-threat maps, new fire-hazard severity maps released by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (on March 10, 2025) propose to add over one million acres as either a “moderate,” “high,” or “very high” fire hazard severity zone.

³ See R.24-06-012 and Assembly Bill 470 (McKinnor).

⁴ Page 65.

III. Conclusion

Ensuring reliable telecommunications and electrical service is critical for public safety, particularly in rural and high-risk areas. While past Decisions have established important resiliency measures, implementation gaps and evolving risks—such as expanded fire hazard areas and potential Carrier of Last Resort changes—necessitate a more comprehensive approach. RCRC urges continued action to enforce existing requirements, address emerging threats, and safeguard communities from avoidable service disruptions. RCRC appreciates your consideration of our comments, and the recommendations contained herein.

Respectfully submitted,

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