

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI**

In the Matter of Application of Socket Telecom, LLC for            )  
Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier            ) **Case No. TA-2021-0224**

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**COMES NOW** the Staff of the Missouri Public Service Commission, by and through counsel, and for its *Recommendation* in this matter hereby states:

1. On January 15, 2021, Socket Telecom, LLC, (Company or Socket) filed *Socket Telecom, LLC's Application for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier and Request for Waiver of 20 CSR 4240-4.017* with the Commission requesting that the Commission issue an order granting the Company eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) status for specific census blocks. The Company's request, if approved, would permit it to receive federal support pursuant to the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction held by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The company also seeks support through the Missouri Universal Service Fund (MoUSF) for Lifeline program purposes.

2. The RDOF program is part of the FCC's attempt to bridge the digital divide. It seeks to expand high speed fixed broadband service to rural homes and small businesses presently lacking the service. Phase one of the auction began October 29, 2020, and targeted over six million homes and businesses unserved by voice and broadband speeds with downloads of at least 25 Mbps. Phase two of the auction will cover areas that are partially unserved and those areas not covered in Phase one. Winning bidders must submit to the FCC proof of their ETC status within 180 days of being announced as a winning bidder.

3. The Company is presently certificated in the state of Missouri as an competitive local exchange carrier. The Company included Exhibit A with its *Application*, which outlines the specific census blocks for which it requests ETC designation.

4. Commission rule 20 CSR 4240-31.016 governs the specific eligible telecommunications carrier requirements that each applicant must meet. Applications must also comply with 20 CSR 4240-2.060 and shall be verified by oath as to the truthfulness contained in the application by an officer or director of the applicant.

5. The FCC requires all winning bidders to submit a Long Form that includes information about a company and its plans to fulfill its bid requirements, which must be approved prior to a company receiving any funds. The ETC process under 20 CSR 4240-31.016 does not address and is not designed to assess a company's technology broadband speed and latency capabilities.

6. Staff conducted an investigation and has provided a memorandum attached to this pleading as Appendix A. Staff's memorandum outlines the reasons why Staff believes Socket Telecom has met the requirements of 20 CSR 4240-31.016 and should receive ETC designation.

7. Socket sought waiver of the 60-day notice requirement pursuant to the Commission's rule 20 CSR 4240-4.017.

**WHEREFORE**, Staff recommends that the Commission approve Socket Telecom, LLC's, request for designation as an eligible telecommunications carrier for the purpose of receiving federal high-cost and low-income support as well as MoUSF low-income support and in compliance with the RDOF Auction; that the designation be specific to the

census blocks identified in Exhibit A of the *Application*; that it grant waiver of the 60-day notice provision; and that it grant such other and further relief as the Commission considers just in the circumstances.

**/s/ Whitney Payne**

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### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing was served by electronic mail, or First Class United States Postal Mail, postage prepaid, on this 16<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2021, to all counsel of record.

**/s/Whitney Payne**

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Missouri Public Service Commission Official Case File  
Case No. TA-2021-0224

**From:** Kari Salsman, Research/Data Analyst  
John Van Eschen, Regulatory Compliance Manager  
Telecommunications Department

**Subject:** Staff's Recommendation to Socket Telecom, LLC's Request for  
ETC Designation

**Date:** February 16, 2021

On January 15, 2021, Socket Telecom, LLC (Socket or company) filed an application for designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) for the purpose of receiving federal high cost and low-income universal service fund support. The company later supplemented its application. Socket is a certificated competitive local exchange company in Missouri.<sup>1</sup> The company was recently awarded federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) support to build broadband facilities in more rural areas.<sup>2</sup> The RDOF funding requires the company to extend broadband service to a designated number of locations in certain census blocks. Socket seeks ETC designation in the won census blocks.<sup>3</sup> Socket is seeking Missouri USF support for Lifeline program purposes.

Federal authority enables state commissions to grant ETC status to a company.<sup>4</sup> Missouri's ETC application requirements are contained in existing Missouri Commission rule 20 CSR 4240-31.016. Staff reviewed the company's request for compliance with Missouri's rule as well as federal requirements. In Staff's opinion the company has adequately met all ETC application requirements. Consequently Staff supports the company's application for ETC status.

Staff recommends the Commission grant ETC status to Socket Telecom, LLC for the purpose of receiving federal high-cost and low-income support and Missouri USF support in the area identified by census blocks in Exhibit A of the company's application.

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<sup>1</sup> Case No. TA-2001-671. The company's principal office is located in Columbia, Missouri.

<sup>2</sup> Socket has been awarded \$232,769 over 10 years to extend broadband service to 393 locations. The company deploys fiber as the last mile technology.

<sup>3</sup> Census Block Service areas are listed in Exhibit A of ETC application. The area covers 82 census blocks in Boone County.

<sup>4</sup> 47 U.S.C. §214(e)(2) and FCC rule §54.201.