

described in this paragraph shall be based on the number of locations that were fully funded pursuant to authorizations made prior to January 1, 2019.

(2) Revised A-CAM I and A-CAM II carriers must complete deployment of 25/3 Mbps service to a number of eligible locations equal to 40 percent of locations required by § 54.308(a)(1) of this subpart by the end of 2022, 50 percent of requisite locations by the end of 2023, 60 percent of requisite locations by the end of 2024, 70 percent of requisite location by the end of 2025, 80 percent of requisite locations by the end of 2026, 90 percent of requisite locations by the end of 2027, and 100 percent of requisite locations by the end of 2028.

(e) *Transition to CAF-ACAM Support.* An A-CAM I, Revised A-CAM I, or A-CAM II carrier whose final model-based support is less than the carrier's legacy rate-of-return support in its base year as defined in paragraph (e)(4) of this section, will transition as follows:

(1) If the difference between a carrier's model-based support and its base year support, as determined by paragraph (e)(4) of this section, is ten percent or less, it will receive, in addition to model-based support, 50 percent of that difference in program year one, and then will receive model support in program years two through ten.

(2) If the difference between a carrier's model-based support and its base year support, as determined in paragraph (e)(4) of this section, is 25 percent or less, but more than 10 percent, it will receive, in addition to model-based support, an additional transition payment for up to four years, and then will receive model support in program years five through ten. The transition payments will be phased-down 20 percent per year, provided that each phase-down amount is at least five percent of the total base year support amount. If 20 percent of the difference between a carrier's model-based support and base year support is less than five percent of the total base year support amount, the transition payments will be phased-down five percent of the total base year support amount each year.

(3) If the difference between a carrier's model-based support and its base year support, as determined in para-

graph (e)(4) of this section, is more than 25 percent, it will receive, in addition to model-based support, an additional transition payment for up to nine years, and then will receive model support in year ten. The transition payments will be phased-down ten percent per year, provided that each phase-down amount is at least five percent of the total base year support amount. If ten percent of the difference between a carrier's model-based support and its base year support is less than five percent of the total base year support amount, the transition payments will be phased-down five percent of the total base year support amount each year.

(4) The carrier's base year support for purposes of the calculation of transition payments is:

(i) For A-CAM I and Revised A-CAM I carriers, the amount of high-cost loop support and interstate common line support disbursed to the carrier for 2015 without regard to prior period adjustments related to years other than 2015, as determined by the Administrator as of January 31, 2016 and publicly announced prior to the election period for the voluntary path to the model; and

(ii) For A-CAM II carriers, the amount of high-cost loop support and Connect America Fund—Broadband Loop Support disbursed to the carrier for 2018 without regard to prior period adjustments related to years other than 2018, as determined by the Administrator as of January 31, 2019 and publicly announced prior to the election period for the voluntary path to the model.

81 FR 24340, Apr. 25, 2016, as amended at 82 FR 14339, Mar. 20, 2017; 84 FR 4731, Feb. 19, 2019]

#### § 54.312 Connect America Fund for Price Cap Territories—Phase I.

(a) *Frozen High-Cost Support.* Beginning January 1, 2012, each price cap local exchange carrier and rate-of-return carrier affiliated with a price cap local exchange carrier will have a "baseline support amount" equal to its total 2011 support in a given study area, or an amount equal to \$3,000 times the number of reported lines for 2011, whichever is lower. For purposes of this section, price cap carriers are

defined pursuant to § 61.3(aa) of this chapter and affiliated companies are determined by § 32.9000 of this chapter. Each price cap local exchange carrier and rate-of-return carrier affiliated with a price cap local exchange carrier will have a “monthly baseline support amount” equal to its baseline support amount divided by twelve. Beginning January 1, 2012, on a monthly basis, eligible carriers will receive their monthly baseline support amount.

(1) “Total 2011 support” is the amount of support disbursed to a price cap local exchange carrier or rate-of-return carrier affiliated with a price cap local exchange carrier for 2011, without regard to prior period adjustments related to years other than 2011 and as determined by USAC on January 31, 2012.

(2) For the purpose of calculating the \$3,000 per line limit, the average of lines reported by a price cap local exchange carrier or rate-of-return carrier affiliated with a price cap local exchange carrier pursuant to line count filings required for December 31, 2010, and December 31, 2011 shall be used.

(3) A carrier receiving frozen high cost support under this rule shall be deemed to be receiving Interstate Access Support and Interstate Common Line Support equal to the amount of support the carrier to which the carrier was eligible under those mechanisms in 2011.

(b) *Incremental Support in 2012.* From January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2012, support in addition to baseline support defined in paragraph (a) of this section will be available for certain price cap local exchange carriers and rate-of-return carriers affiliated with price cap local exchange carriers as follows.

(1) For each carrier for which the Wireline Competition Bureau determines that it has appropriate data or for which it determines that it can make reasonable estimates, the Bureau will determine an average per-location cost for each wire center using a simplified cost-estimation function derived from the Commission’s cost model. Incremental support will be based on the wire centers for which the estimated per-location cost exceeds the funding threshold. The funding threshold will be determined by calculating

which funding threshold would allocate all available incremental support, if each carrier that would be offered incremental support were to accept it.

(2) An eligible telecommunications carrier accepting incremental support must deploy broadband to a number of unserved locations, as shown as unserved by fixed broadband on the then-current version of the National Broadband Map, equal to the amount of incremental support it accepts divided by \$775.

(3) A carrier may elect to accept or decline incremental support. A holding company may do so on a holding-company basis on behalf of its operating companies that are eligible telecommunications carriers, whose eligibility for incremental support, for these purposes, shall be considered on an aggregated basis. A carrier must provide notice to the Commission, relevant state commissions, and any affected Tribal government, stating the amount of incremental support it wishes to accept and identifying the areas by wire center and census block in which the designated eligible telecommunications carrier will deploy broadband to meet its deployment obligation, or stating that it declines incremental support. Such notification must be made within 90 days of being notified of any incremental support for which it would be eligible. Along with its notification, a carrier accepting incremental support must also submit a certification that the locations to be served to satisfy the deployment obligation are not shown as served by fixed broadband provided by any entity other than the certifying entity or its affiliate on the then-current version of the National Broadband Map; that, to the best of the carrier’s knowledge, the locations are, in fact, unserved by fixed broadband; that the carrier’s current capital improvement plan did not already include plans to complete broadband deployment within the next three years to the locations to be counted to satisfy the deployment obligation; and that incremental support will not be used to satisfy any merger commitment or similar regulatory obligation. If a carrier intends to deploy to census blocks not initially identified at the time of election, it must inform

the Commission, the Administrator, relevant state commissions, and any affected Tribal government of the change at least 90 days prior to commencing deployment in the new census blocks. No sooner than 46 days after the Wireline Competition Bureau issues a public notice announcing the updated deployment plans but prior to commencing deployment, the carrier must make the certifications described in this paragraph with respect to the new census blocks. If a carrier no longer intends to deploy to a previously identified census block, it must inform the Commission, the Administrator, relevant state commission, and any affected Tribal government prior to filing its certification pursuant to § 54.313(b)(2).

(c) *Incremental Support in 2013.* From January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013, support in addition to baseline support defined in paragraph (a) of this section will be available for certain price cap local exchange carriers and rate-of-return carriers affiliated with price cap local exchange carriers as follows:

(1) For each carrier for which the Wireline Competition Bureau determines that it has appropriate data or for which it determines that it can make reasonable estimates, the Bureau will determine an average per-location cost for each wire center using a simplified cost-estimation function derived from the Commission's high-cost proxy model. Incremental support will be based on the wire centers for which the estimated per-location cost exceeds the funding threshold. The funding threshold will be determined by calculating which funding threshold would allocate all available incremental support, if each carrier that would be offered incremental support were to accept it.

(2) An eligible telecommunications carrier accepting incremental support must deploy broadband to a number of unserved locations, shown as unserved by fixed Internet access with speeds of at least 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream on the then-current version of the National Broadband Map, equal to the amount of incremental support it accepts divided by \$775.

(3) An eligible telecommunications carrier must accept funding pursuant to paragraph (c)(2) of this section before it may accept funding pursuant to paragraph (c)(3) of this section. If an eligible telecommunications carrier has committed to deploy to all locations eligible for support under paragraph (c)(2) of this section on routes or projects that can economically be built with \$775 in Connect America funding for each location unserved by 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream plus an equal amount of non-Connect America carrier capital expenditure funding, but the carrier has not fully utilized its allotted funding, it may also count towards its deployment obligation locations shown as unserved by fixed Internet access with speeds of at least 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream equal to the amount of remaining incremental support divided by \$550.

(4) A carrier may elect to accept or decline incremental support. A holding company may do so on a holding-company basis on behalf of its operating companies that are eligible telecommunications carriers, whose eligibility for incremental support, for these purposes, shall be considered on an aggregated basis. A carrier must provide notice to the Commission, the Administrator, relevant state commissions, and any affected Tribal government, stating the amount of incremental support it wishes to accept, the number of locations at the \$775 amount, and the number of locations at the \$550 amount, and identifying the areas by wire center and census block in which the designated eligible telecommunications carrier will deploy broadband to meet its deployment obligation; or stating that it declines incremental support. Such notification must be made within 75 days of being notified of any incremental support for which it would be eligible. If a carrier intends to deploy to census blocks not initially identified at the time of election, it must inform the Commission, the Administrator, relevant state commissions, and any affected Tribal government of the change at least 90 days prior to commencing deployment in the new census blocks. No sooner than 46 days after the Wireline Competition

Bureau issues a public notice announcing the updated deployment plans but prior to commencing deployment, the carrier must make the certifications described in paragraph (c)(5) of this section with respect to the new census blocks. If a carrier no longer intends to deploy to a previously identified census block, it must inform the Commission, the Administrator, relevant state commission, and any affected Tribal government prior to filing its certification pursuant to § 54.313(b)(2).

(5) Along with its notification, an eligible telecommunications carrier accepting incremental support must submit the following certifications:

(i) The locations to be served to satisfy the deployment obligation are not shown as served by fixed broadband at the speeds specified in paragraph (c)(2) or (c)(3) of this section provided by any entity other than the certifying entity or its affiliate on the then-current version of the National Broadband Map or that it is challenging the National Broadband Map's designation of that census block under the challenge process in paragraph (c)(7) of this section;

(ii) To the best of the carrier's knowledge, the locations are, in fact, unserved by fixed Internet access with speeds of at least 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream, or 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream, as appropriate;

(iii) The carrier's current capital improvement plan did not already include plans to complete broadband deployment within the next three years to the locations to be counted to satisfy the deployment obligation;

(iv) Incremental support will not be used to satisfy any merger commitment or similar regulatory obligation; and

(v) The carrier has undertaken due diligence to determine the locations in question are not within the service area of either Broadband Initiatives Program or the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program projects that will provide Internet access with speeds of at least 3 Mbps downstream and 768 upstream.

(6) An eligible telecommunications carrier deploying to locations unserved by 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream under paragraph (c)(3) of this

section must also certify that it has prioritized its planned projects or routes so as to maximize the deployment of broadband-capable infrastructure to locations lacking Internet access with speeds of 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream.

(7) A person may challenge the designation of a census block as served or unserved by a certain speed as shown on the National Broadband Map. When the Wireline Competition Bureau determines that the evidence presented makes it more likely than not that the census block should be designated as served by broadband with speeds of at least 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream, that locations in that census block will be treated as served by broadband and therefore ineligible to be counted for the purposes of paragraph (c)(3) of this section. When the Wireline Competition Bureau determines that the evidence presented makes it more likely than not that the census block should be designated as served by Internet service with speeds of 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream, but unserved by broadband with speeds of at least 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream, locations in that census block will be treated as served by Internet access with speeds of 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream and therefore eligible to be counted for the purposes of paragraph (c)(3) of this section. When the Wireline Competition Bureau determines that the evidence presented makes it more likely than not that the census block should be designated as unserved by Internet service with speeds of 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream, locations in that census block will be treated as unserved by Internet access with speeds of 768 kbps downstream and 200 kbps upstream and therefore eligible to be counted for the purposes of paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(8) If no entity other than the carrier or its affiliate provides Internet service with speeds of 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream or greater as shown on the National Broadband Map or as determined by the process described in paragraph (c)(7), the carrier may satisfy its deployment obligations at a location shown by the National

Broadband Map as being served by that carrier or its affiliate with such service by certifying that it is the only entity providing such service, that the location does not actually receive speeds of 3 Mbps downstream and 768 kbps upstream, and the location is served through a copper-fed digital subscriber line access multiplexer. The carrier must specifically identify such locations in its election. Such locations will be treated the same as locations under paragraph (c)(3) of this section.

(9) An eligible telecommunications carrier must complete deployment of broadband-capable infrastructure to two-thirds of the required number of locations within two years of providing notification of acceptance of funding, and must complete deployment to all required locations within three years. To satisfy its deployment obligation, the eligible telecommunications carrier must offer broadband service to such locations of at least 4 Mbps downstream and 1 Mbps upstream, with latency sufficiently low to enable the use of real-time communications, including Voice over Internet Protocol, and with usage allowances, if any, associated with a specified price for a service offering that are reasonably comparable to comparable offerings in urban areas.

(d) *Eligibility for support after Connect America Phase II auction.* (1) A price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section and is a winning bidder in the Connect America Phase II auction shall receive support at the same level as described in paragraph (a) of this section for such area until the Wireline Competition Bureau determines whether to authorize the carrier to receive Connect America Phase II auction support for the same area. Upon the Wireline Competition Bureau's release of a public notice approving a price cap carrier's application submitted pursuant to § 54.315(b) and authorizing the carrier to receive Connect America Fund Phase II auction support, the carrier shall no longer receive support at the level of monthly baseline support pursuant to this section for such area. Thereafter, the carrier shall receive monthly support in the amount of its Connect America Phase II winning bid.

(2) Starting the first day of the month following the first authorization of Connect America Phase II auction support nationwide, no price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section shall receive such monthly baseline support for areas that are ineligible for Connect America Phase II auction support.

(3) To the extent Connect America Phase II auction support is not awarded at auction for an eligible area, as determined by the Wireline Competition Bureau, the price cap carrier shall have the option of continuing to receive support at the level described in paragraph (a) of this section until further Commission action.

(4) Starting the first day of the month following the authorization of Connect America Phase II auction support to a winning bidder other than the price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section for such area, the price cap carrier shall no longer receive monthly baseline support pursuant to this section.

(5) Notwithstanding the foregoing schedule, the phase-down of support below the level described in paragraph (a) of this section shall be subject to the restrictions in Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Public Law 114-113, Div. E, Title VI, section 631, 129 Stat. 2242, 2470 (2015), unless and until such restrictions are no longer in effect.

(e) *Eligibility for support after Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction.* (1) A price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section and is a winning bidder in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction shall receive support at the same level as described in paragraph (a) of this section for such area until the Wireline Competition Bureau determines whether to authorize the carrier to receive Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support for the same area. Upon the Wireline Competition Bureau's release of a public notice approving a price cap carrier's application submitted pursuant to § 54.315(b) and authorizing the carrier to receive Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support, the carrier shall no longer receive support at the level of monthly baseline support pursuant to this section for such area. Thereafter,

the carrier shall receive monthly support in the amount of its Rural Digital Opportunity Fund winning bid.

(2) Starting the first day of the month following the release of the final eligible areas list for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction, as determined by the Wireline Competition Bureau, no price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section shall receive such monthly baseline support for areas that are ineligible for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction.

(3) Starting the first day of the month following the close of Phase I of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction, no price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section shall receive such monthly baseline support for areas where Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support is not awarded at auction for an eligible area.

(4) Starting the first day of the month following the authorization of Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support to a winning bidder other than the price cap carrier that receives monthly baseline support pursuant to this section for such area, the price cap carrier shall no longer receive monthly baseline support pursuant to this section.

[76 FR 73872, Nov. 29, 2011, as amended at 77 FR 31536, May 29, 2012; 78 FR 38233, June 26, 2013; 78 FR 48624, Aug. 9, 2013; 84 FR 8624, Mar. 11, 2019; 85 FR 13797, Mar. 10, 2020]

**§ 54.313 Annual reporting requirements for high-cost recipients.**

(a) Any recipient of high-cost support shall provide the following:

(1) Certification that the carrier is able to function in emergency situations as set forth in § 54.202(a)(2);

(2) A certification that the pricing of the company's voice services is no more than two standard deviations above the applicable national average urban rate for voice service, as specified in the most recent public notice issued by the Wireline Competition Bureau and Wireless Telecommunications Bureau;

(3) A certification that the pricing of a service that meets the Commission's broadband public interest obligations is no more than the applicable bench-

mark to be announced annually in a public notice issued by the Wireline Competition Bureau, or is no more than the non-promotional price charged for a comparable fixed wireline service in urban areas in the states or U.S. Territories where the eligible telecommunications carrier receives support;

(4) The recipient's holding company, operating companies, affiliates, and any branding (a "dba," or "doing-business-as company" or brand designation), as well as universal service identifiers for each such entity by Study Area Codes, as that term is used by the Administrator. For purposes of this paragraph, "affiliates" has the meaning set forth in section 3(2) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended;

(5) To the extent the recipient serves Tribal lands, documents or information demonstrating that the ETC had discussions with Tribal governments that, at a minimum, included:

(i) A needs assessment and deployment planning with a focus on Tribal community anchor institutions;

(ii) Feasibility and sustainability planning;

(iii) Marketing services in a culturally sensitive manner;

(iv) Rights of way processes, land use permitting, facilities siting, environmental and cultural preservation review processes; and

(v) Compliance with Tribal business and licensing requirements. Tribal business and licensing requirements include business practice licenses that Tribal and non-Tribal business entities, whether located on or off Tribal lands, must obtain upon application to the relevant Tribal government office or division to conduct any business or trade, or deliver any goods or services to the Tribes, Tribal members, or Tribal lands. These include certificates of public convenience and necessity, Tribal business licenses, master licenses, and other related forms of Tribal government licensure.

(6) The results of network performance tests pursuant to the methodology and in the format determined by the Wireline Competition Bureau, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and Office of Engineering and Technology.