

Gov. Walker: Touts Telecommunications Grants to Non-Profit Organizations

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Madison – Governor Scott Walker joined the Public Service Commission (PSC) today in announcing recipients of Fiscal Year 2017 Universal Service Fund Grants for Telecommunications Access Programs or Projects by Non-Profit Groups. Projects receiving funds will support low-income and disabled customers' access to telecommunications service. This year, grants may also include funding for computer labs, broadband connections, or other internet-related projects.

"We are committed to using all the tools at our disposal to help boost broadband service," said Governor Walker. "The funds allocated by PSC today will help some of the states' most vulnerable access telecommunications equipment and internet service."

The Universal Service Fund is collected via fees from telecommunication providers and PSC may award up to \$500,000 annually to non-profit organizations. Examples of reimbursable costs now include funding for computer labs, broadband connections, or other internet-related projects, in addition to the costs of traditional telecommunications services and equipment, training of those served by the program in order to best utilize the services and equipment, and the technical support required to implement a program for low-income and disabled individuals.

"The non-profit grants have been an important tool in assisting organizations in accessing telecommunications equipment they might not otherwise have been able to procure," explained PSC Chairperson Ellen Nowak. "This year, they will have even more of a sustained impact by allowing grant dollars to go directly towards access to broadband and computer labs."

In addition to the grant recipients below, the Commission committed to funding a \$350,000 request by eight Independent Living Centers (ILCs) under the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program. These ILCs provide support services to assure access by the many disabled individuals throughout Wisconsin to essential telecommunications services.

2017 Universal Service Fund Grant Recipients:

- **ABC for Health, Inc.** – \$28,100 to provide outreach and training to low-income families and those with children with disabilities about reduced cost telecommunication services and equipment for which they qualify.
- **Community Action Coalition (CAC) for South Central Wisconsin, Inc.** – \$36,000 to provide low-income households with financial assistance, budget counseling and mediation with telecommunications service providers in order for them to obtain and maintain telecommunications services.
- **DANenet** – \$20,000 to help low-income households get affordable internet access, provide low-cost computers to low-income households, and provide digital literacy workshop and drop-in tech support to make the devices and connectivity useful.
- **HEAR Wisconsin Store** – \$10,675 to provide outreach, co-payment assistance, and in-home visits to ensure equal access to the Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) and provide training and follow-up support to clients who require captioned telephone service.
- **Independent Living, Inc.** – \$50,000 to install wiring and equipment to make a variety of telecommunications options available to residents of a new 135-unit affordable housing development.
- **New Concept Self Development Center** – \$22,200 to provide continuous access to telecommunications services to low-income community residents during evenings and weekends.
- **Northwest Wisconsin CEP** – \$44,588 to assist low-income customers in obtaining and maintaining affordable access to a basic set of telecommunications services in 10 counties in Northwestern Wisconsin to provide education on, and work with, the Lifeline program.
- **Vision Forward Association, Inc.** – \$29,100 to provide access to and training on state-of-the-art cell phones and smartphones to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and help them navigate in life and maintain their independence.
- **Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council** – \$32,225 to equip low-income, entrepreneurial individuals in rural areas of six counties with laptops, mobile hotspots, and education so they can access the internet, engage with the global market, and achieve self-employment.
- **WiscNet and Green Bay Area Schools** – \$75,000 to investigate and provide access to technologies to provide students in low-income, under-served families in the Green Bay area with affordable access to internet-based school content from home.
- **YWCA Southeast Wisconsin** – \$42,230 to provide telecommunications access and related resource assistance for a minimum of 750 unduplicated low-income individuals in Milwaukee and Racine Counties.