

RCW 54.16.330 Telecommunications facilities—Purposes—

Limitations—Provision of telecommunications services—Eminent domain.

(1) A public utility district in existence on June 8, 2000, may construct, purchase, acquire, develop, finance, lease, license, handle, provide, add to, contract for, interconnect, alter, improve, repair, operate, and maintain any telecommunications facilities within or without the district's limits for the following purposes:

(a) For the district's internal telecommunications needs;

(b) For the provision of wholesale telecommunications services as follows:

(i) Within the district and by contract with another public utility district;

(ii) Within an area in an adjoining county that is already provided electrical services by the district; or

(iii) Within an adjoining county that does not have a public utility district providing electrical or telecommunications services headquartered within the county's boundaries, but only if the district providing telecommunications services is not authorized to provide electrical services; or

(c) For the provision of retail telecommunications services as authorized in this section.

(2) A public utility district providing wholesale or retail telecommunications services shall ensure that rates, terms, and conditions for such services are not unduly or unreasonably discriminatory or preferential. Rates, terms, and conditions are discriminatory or preferential when a public utility district offering rates, terms, and conditions to an entity for wholesale or retail telecommunications services does not offer substantially similar rates, terms, and conditions to all other entities seeking substantially similar services.

(3) A public utility district providing wholesale or retail telecommunications services shall not be required to, but may, establish a separate utility system or function for such purpose. In either case, a public utility district providing wholesale or retail telecommunications services shall separately account for any revenues and expenditures for those services according to standards established by the state auditor pursuant to its authority in chapter 43.09 RCW and consistent with the provisions of this title. Any revenues received from the provision of wholesale or retail telecommunications services must be dedicated to costs incurred to build and maintain any telecommunications facilities constructed, installed, or acquired to provide such services, including payments on debt issued to finance such services, until such time as any bonds or other financing instruments executed after June 8, 2000, and used to finance such telecommunications facilities are discharged or retired.

(4) When a public utility district provides wholesale or retail telecommunications services, all telecommunications services rendered to the district for the district's internal telecommunications needs shall be allocated or charged at its true and full value. A public utility district may not charge its nontelecommunications operations rates that are preferential or discriminatory compared to those it charges entities purchasing wholesale or retail telecommunications services.

(5) If a person or entity receiving retail telecommunications services from a public utility district under this section has a complaint regarding the reasonableness of the rates, terms,

conditions, or services provided, the person or entity may file a complaint with the district commission.

(6) A public utility district shall not exercise powers of eminent domain to acquire telecommunications facilities or contractual rights held by any other person or entity to telecommunications facilities.

(7) Except as otherwise specifically provided, a public utility district may exercise any of the powers granted to it under this title and other applicable laws in carrying out the powers authorized under this section. Nothing in chapter 81, Laws of 2000 limits any existing authority of a public utility district under this title.

(8) A public utility district may provide retail telecommunications services or telecommunications facilities within the district's limits or without the district's limits by contract with another public utility district, any political subdivision of the state authorized to provide retail telecommunications services in the state, or with any federally recognized tribe located in the state of Washington.

(9) (a) A public utility district may provide retail telecommunications services to end users in unserved areas.

(b) A public utility district must notify and consult with the governor's statewide broadband office within 30 days of its decision to provide retail telecommunications services to unserved areas. The governor's statewide broadband office must post notices received from a public utility district pursuant to this subsection on its public website.

(c) Any public utility district that intends to provide retail telecommunications services to unserved areas must submit a telecommunications infrastructure and service plan to the governor's statewide broadband office that will be published on the office's website. Submission of plans will enable the governor's statewide broadband office: (i) To better understand infrastructure deployment; (ii) to potentially allocate funding for unserved areas; (iii) to advance the state policy objectives; (iv) to determine whether the plan aligns with state policy objectives and broadband priorities; (v) to measure progress toward serving those in unserved areas; (vi) to report on the feasibility and sustainability of the project; and (vii) to confirm that the project is within an unserved area. The telecommunications infrastructure and service plans shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(A) Map and description of how the deployment of proposed broadband infrastructure will achieve at a minimum 100 megabits per second download speed and at a minimum 20 megabits per second upload speed and then increases to be consistent with the stated long-term state broadband speed goals for unserved areas;

(B) Project timeline prioritization of unserved areas; and

(C) Description of potential state and federal funding available to provide service to the unserved area.

(d) A public utility district that exercises its authority under (a) of this subsection to provide retail telecommunications services may use state funds, federal funds appropriated through the state, or federal funds dedicated for projects in unserved areas to fund projects identified in the submitted telecommunications infrastructure and service plan required in (c) of this subsection.

(e) A public utility district providing retail telecommunications services under this subsection must operate an open access network.

(f) This section does not apply to retail internet services provided by a public utility district under *RCW 54.16.420.

(g) Provisions in this subsection do not apply to the provision of wholesale telecommunications services authorized in this section.

(h) For the purposes of this subsection:

(i) "Open access network" means a network that, during the useful life of the infrastructure, ensures service providers may use network services and facilities at rates, terms, and conditions that are not discriminatory or preferential between providers, and employs accountable interconnection arrangements published and available publicly.

(ii) "Unserved areas" means areas of Washington in which households and businesses lack access to broadband service of speeds at a minimum of 100 megabits per second download and at a minimum 20 megabits per second upload. [2023 c 470 § 1011. Prior: 2021 c 294 § 2; 2021 c 293 § 2; 2019 c 365 § 9; 2004 c 158 § 1; 2000 c 81 § 3.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 54.16.420 was repealed by 2021 c 294 § 13.

Explanatory statement—2023 c 470: See note following RCW 10.99.030.

Short title—2021 c 294: "This act may be known and cited as the public broadband act." [2021 c 294 § 12.]

Findings—2021 c 293: "The legislature finds that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that equitable access to education can only happen with equitable access to reliable broadband. Increasing broadband access to unserved areas of the state is of vital importance to increasing quality of life, broadening educational opportunities, and promoting economic inclusion in the parts of our state that, without broadband access, cannot fully participate in modern society. The legislature further finds that one of the most effective tools to ensure all Washingtonians have an opportunity to equitably access education, the job market, and health care resources is to allow our public utility districts and port districts to provide retail telecommunications services." [2021 c 293 § 1.]

Findings—2019 c 365: See note following RCW 43.330.532.

Findings—2000 c 81: See note following RCW 53.08.005.