USF Support – Legacy Fund Overview

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Agenda

- Background
- Data reporting and certification
- USF support processes
- Reminders and reference
- Open proceedings

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Background
Programs

- Legacy
  - Connect America Fund Broadband Loop Support
  - High-Cost Loop Support
  - Connect America Fund Intercarrier Compensation Support
- Model
  - Alternative Connect America Cost Model
  - Alaska Plan/Alaska Connect Fund

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Background
CAF BLS

- Created by the 2016 Rate-of-Return Reform Order* to encourage broadband deployment
  - Allows recipients to recover a portion of the cost to provide broadband loops in addition to recovery on voice loops
- Projected support is calculated on a test period basis
- Final support (true-up) is calculated on a calendar year basis
- Subject to deployment obligations (through 2023) and support limits
- 47 CFR §§54.901 – 54.903

*FCC 16-33, released March 30, 2016

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Background
HCLS

- Created by the Telecom Act of 1996
- Helps non-model, non-price-cap affiliated companies recover loop costs in high-cost areas
- Historical support based on actual costs
- Payments are calculated using study area cost per loop, loop count and the frozen national average cost per loop on a calendar year basis
- Total HCL payments may not exceed a fund cap
  - Pro rata adjustment factor is applied to meet the cap
  - Other support limits also apply

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Background
HCLS

- Safety valve support
  - Additional support above HCLS fund cap for HCLS-eligible rural carriers that acquired exchanges if the following are true:
    - Made a substantial investment to infrastructure in the acquired exchanges and
    - Improved service in those exchanges
- 47 CFR §§54.1301 – 54.1310

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Background
CAF ICC

- The 2011 Transformation Order* required ILECs to reduce several switched access rates over a multiyear period, declining annually
- Created to provide phased-down support to offset a portion of the lost revenue due to the reduction in switched access rates
  - Access recovery charge was a new end user charge to help recover additional lost switching revenue
- Projected and final (true-up) support are calculated on a test period basis
- 47 CFR §51.917

*FCC 11-161, released Nov. 18, 2011

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Background
Model-based funds

- A-CAM – fixed payments based on forward looking costs
  - A-CAM I, Revised A-CAM I and A-CAM II – 10-year terms
  - Enhanced A-CAM – 15-year term
  - Subject to performance, deployment and cybersecurity plan obligations
  - 47 CFR §54.311 and 47 CFR §54.308
- Alaska Plan/Alaska Connect Fund
  - Support amounts frozen for 10-year term/through 2034
  - Subject to FCC-approved performance plans
  - 47 CFR §54.306

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Reporting and certification
CAF BLS

- Report data to NECA via settlements, cost studies and forecasts*
- Review/certify forms 508 and 509**
- Review/certify Form 507 line count data***
- If data corrections are needed after Form 509 is filed:
  - Corrections decreasing support can be filed immediately
  - Corrections increasing support are only filed if waiver request filed with and granted by FCC
- Follow NECA's Form 509 reporting guidelines in cost pool procedures*

*CL pool members

**CL pool members using NECA as an agent for CAF BLS filings with USAC
***Companies using NECA as an agent for line count filings with USAC

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Reporting and certification
HCLS

- Report data to annual USF data collection (closes July 31)
- Optional: Report monthly adjustments
- Companies must:
  - Report financial information sufficient to support USF data submission
  - Certify submitted data

Note: Per FCC order 33 FCC Rcd 10403, companies receiving model-based support must continue to report USF data unless they have elected incentive regulation for BDS

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Reporting and certification
CAF ICC

- Report projected data to NECA CAF ICC data collection (NECA TS and TS/SW participants)
  - True-up based on data reported via settlements
- In addition to data certification, the following certifications are filed with the annual access tariff filing:
  - Eligibility for CAF ICC recovery (compliance ER and ARC)
  - Not seeking duplicative recovery
  - Accuracy of the CAF ICC data reported

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Reporting and certification
Model-based funds

- USF data collection (July 31)
  - Mandatory for non-BDS electors
- Form 507 line count (July 1)
  - Mandatory for all model-based companies
  - Can elect to have NECA file on your behalf

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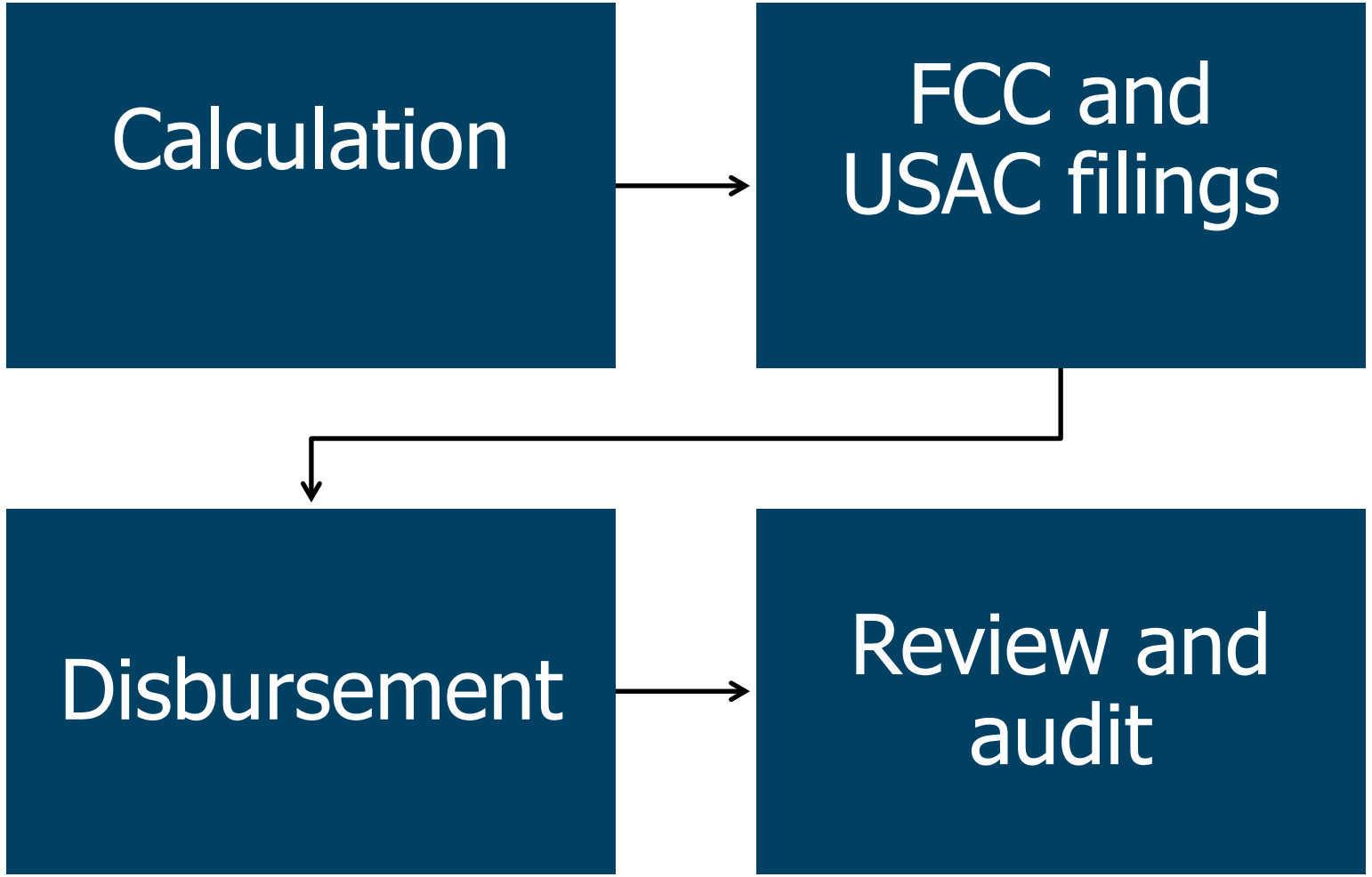
Reporting and certification
All funds

- Required reporting/certifications filed directly with USAC for the following:
  - Performance measures testing*
    - Quarterly – two weeks after end of quarter
  - March 1: HUBB, 47 CFR §54.316*
  - July 1: Form 481, 47 CFR §54.313
  - Oct. 1: state certification of support for ETCs, 47 CFR §54.314
  - Dec. 31: mixed merger companies

* Not required for CAF ICC

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USF support processes



Source: Microsoft Office 365

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USF support processes
Calculation – CAF BLS (projected)

- NECA collects data needed for Form 508 filing
  - RRQ from cost forecasts
  - Annual forecast line count data collection
- NECA calculates estimated projected CAF BLS support for CL pool members
  - Form 508 review form
- USAC calculates projected CAF BLS support using
  - Form 508 data
  - Applicable BCM and cap amounts

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USF support processes
Calculation – CAF BLS (final)

- NECA collects data needed for Form 509 filing
  - RRQ from cost studies for cost companies and from settlements for average schedule companies
  - Actual line counts and revenues from NECA settlement system
- NECA calculates estimated final CAF BLS support for CL pool members
  - Form 509 review form
- USAC calculates final CAF BLS support

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USF support processes
Calculation – HCLS

- NECA does the following annually:
  - Develops study area national average cost per loop
  - Calculates expense adjustments
  - Calculates pro rata adjustment
- NECA provides USAC with a file of HCLS payment amounts monthly
- USAC calculates BCM and cap adjustments

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USF support processes
Calculation – CAF ICC

- NECA calculates estimated CAF ICC support
  - Projected support based on forecasted switched access revenue and demand
  - True-up adjustments for test period two years prior based on the difference between forecasted revenue and actual revenue
- USAC calculates final CAF ICC support based on filed data

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USF support processes
FCC and USAC filings – CAF BLS

- NECA, on behalf of common line pool members:
  - Collects and files company-certified data as agent
    - Form 508 projected data filed with USAC no later than March 31 for coming test period (July 1 to June 30)
    - Form 509 true-up data filed with USAC no later than Dec. 31 for prior calendar year
    - Form 507 line count data filed with USAC no later than March 31 reflecting data as of Dec. 31 of prior calendar year

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USF support processes
FCC and USAC filings – HCL

- NECA does the following:
  - Submits annual filing to FCC and USAC (Oct. 1)
  - Provides USAC with a monthly file of HCLS payment amounts, including updated data based on optional monthly adjustments

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USF support processes
FCC and USAC filings – CAF ICC

- NECA files support data as agent
  - CAF ICC data included in annual tariff filing
  - CAF ICC data filed with USAC concurrent with annual tariff filing
  - Correction filings
- NECA calculates and files ARC rates
  - Annual tariff filing
  - Voluntary rate change and correction filings

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USF support processes
FCC and USAC filings – model-based funds

- NECA does the following:
  - Files mandatory line count (Form 507) data upon company request
    - No fee if participating in any NECA tariff/pool
    - Fee for nonpool participants
  - Files USF data submission for model-based carriers that have not elected incentive regulation for BDS

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USF support processes
Disbursement – pooled funds

- As Form 498 agent, NECA receives and pools disbursed support on behalf of the following:
  - CAF BLS – common line pool members
  - CAF ICC – TS and TS/SW pool members
- Pooled support flows through settlements process and is recovered through the net balance, as shown in the high-cost detail section of both the estimated and final statements
  - NECA ensures disbursed funds align with settlements process
    - CAF BLS – voice/CBOL split
    - CAF ICC – current/true-up/double recovery split

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USF support processes
Disbursement – nonpooled funds

- NECA receives and disburses support as Form 498 agent:
  - CAF ICC – nonpoolers
  - HCLS
  - Model-based funds
  - Other funds
- Nonpooled amounts appear as line items on estimated and final statements
  - Nonpooled funds listed above
  - BCM and CAP for CAF BLS and HCLS
  - Other nonpooled adjustments (e.g., audit recovery)

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USF support processes
Review and audit

- USAC's common findings for the high-cost program include*:
  - Lack of documentation or inaccurate data to support form submissions
  - Improper allocation methodology
  - Inaccurate depreciation calculation
  - Support not used for high-cost purposes
  - Misclassified assets, expenses and/or liabilities
  - Inaccurate loop count

*source: usac.org

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USF support processes
Review and audit

- NECA supports members by:
  - Providing data to members (BCAP, PQA, limited review)
  - Providing data to USAC (agreed upon procedures, HCLS validation)
  - Providing education/clarification to USAC audit staff and operations staff as needed

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USF support processes
Review and audit

- USAC's audits and reviews include the following:
  - Beneficiary and Contributor Audit Program
  - Payment Quality Assurance
  - Limited review
  - Agreed upon procedures audit
    - CAF ICC TRP
  - HCLS calculation validation
  - CAF BLS trend analysis
  - CAF ICC trend analysis

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Reminders and reference

- Reporting and certification tools at neca.org > My Applications for the following:
  - CAF BLS data certifications (forms 508 and 509)
  - CAF ICC Data Collection
  - Form 507, annual Line Count Data Collection
  - USF high-cost loop

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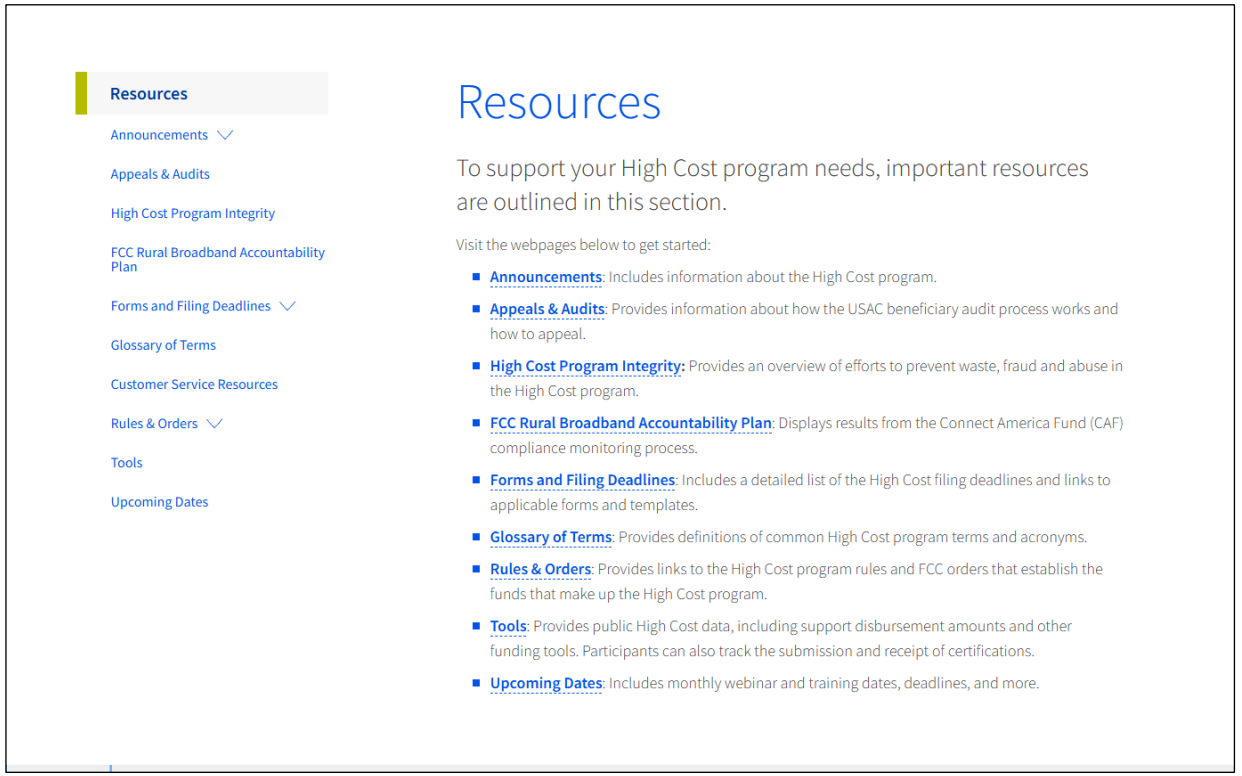
Reminders and reference

- Important to keep FCC Form 498 updated
  - 498 ID service provider identification number and contact information form filed with USAC
    - Declares disbursement election
    - Used by USAC for outreach
  - SAM.gov unique entity identifier required as of September 2026
  - Verify information annually
    - General contact critical
    - Active SAM.gov registration (verify on SAM.gov site)

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Reminders and reference

- USAC resources
  - USAC.org/high-cost/resources/



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Open proceedings
Intercarrier compensation reform

- Notice of proposed rulemaking FCC 26-11
  - WC Docket No. 25-311, Reforming Legacy Rules for All-IP Future
  - WC Docket No. 25-208, Accelerating Network Modernization
- Adopted: Feb. 18, 2026
- Released: Feb. 19, 2026
- Published in the Federal Register: March 24, 2026
- Comment cycle: May 26, 2026
- Reply comment cycle: June 22, 2026

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Open proceedings
Intercarrier compensation reform

- NPRM sought comment on possible regulatory changes to reflect the move from TDM-network switching to IP-network technologies, including:
  - Transition of access charges to bill-and-keep
  - Defining the network edge for allocating transport cost responsibilities between carriers, both during transition and after full IP migration
  - Eliminating ex ante pricing regulation of end user charges, detariffing them, phasing out CAF ICC support and whether additional funding is needed to facilitate the IP transition
  - Deregulating and detariffing domestic interstate and international interexchange services

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Open proceedings
High-cost modernization initiative

- Notice of proposed rulemaking FCC 26-35
  - WC Docket No. 26-26, Reforming the High-Cost Program for an All-IP Future
  - WC Docket No. 10-90, Connect America Fund: A National Broadband Plan for our Future High-Cost Universal Support
- Adopted: May 20, 2026
- Released: May 21, 2026
- Published in the Federal Register: June 5, 2026
- Comment cycle: Aug. 4, 2026
- Reply comment cycle: Sept. 3, 2026

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Open proceedings
High-cost modernization initiative

- Modernization objectives include:
  - Supporting the FCC's Build America agenda
  - Supporting American leadership in AI by efficiently supporting the broadband networks upon which AI-enhanced applications and services rely
  - Helping to accelerate the transition to all-IP networks

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Open proceedings
High-cost modernization initiative

- In 2023, the FCC sought comment on how to modernize legacy support mechanisms to align them with the current broadband deployment and support environment
- This NPRM sought to refresh the record and suggests three possible paths forward:
  - Update these high-cost support mechanisms to align with the current landscape
  - Establish a new single modernized fixed-support mechanism replacement
  - Take no further action and maintain the status quo for legacy support mechanisms and allow the A-CAM support mechanisms to sunset

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Open proceedings
High-cost modernization initiative

- The NPRM sought comment on the above options and also on:
  - Support in competitive areas
  - Satellite broadband service availability and its impact
  - Deployment obligations
  - Short term A-CAM I extension
  - USF's role in the IP-based transition

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Open proceedings
Universal service administration

- Notice of proposed rulemaking FCC 26-52
  - WC Docket No. 26-173, Maximizing Efficiencies in Universal Service Administration
- Adopted: Aug. 6, 2026
- Released: Aug. 7, 2026
- Published in the Federal Register: Aug. 31, 2026
- Comment cycle: Sept. 30, 2026
- Reply comment cycle: Oct. 30, 2026

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Open proceedings
Universal service administration

- Objective is to strengthen FCC management and administration of USF and its oversight of USAC
- NPRM seeks comment on:
  - Current USF administration processes (transparency and timeliness)
  - Structure of USF administration (USAC roles and responsibilities)
  - Operating costs associated with USF administration
  - Impact of USAC's board of directors on USF administration

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Summary

- There are several USF support funds available for rate-of-return carriers
- Each fund has its own rules and processes
- Open FCC proceedings will affect USF mechanisms and administration
- NECA is here to help you with current support processes and will continue to monitor proceedings for changes to these processes

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Acronyms

A-CAM	Alternative Connect America Model
ARC	Access Recovery Charge
BCM	Budget Control Mechanism
BDS	Business Data Services
CAF	Connect America Fund
CAF BLS	Connect America Fund Broadband Loop Support
CAF ICC	Connect America Fund Intercarrier Compensation
CBOL	Consumer Broadband Only Loop
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CL	Common Line
ER	Earned Revenue
ETC	Eligible Telecommunications Carrier
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
HCL	High-Cost Loop
HCLS	High-Cost Loop Support

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Acronyms

HUBB	High-Cost Universal Broadband
ILEC	Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier
NACPL	National Average Cost Per Loop
NECA	National Exchange Carrier Association
NOI	Notice of Inquiry
NPRM	Notice of Proposed Rulemaking
OpEx	Operating Expenses
RoR	Rate of Return
SACPL	Study Area Cost Per Loop
SPIN	Service Provider Identification Number
SVS	Safety Valve Support
SW	Switched
TS	Traffic Sensitive
USAC	Universal Service Administrative Company
USF	Universal Service Fund

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