

PSC DEPARTMENT DIGEST



Nebraska Public Service Commission

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PSC Telecom/NUSF Department

The Telecommunications/NUSF Department of the Nebraska Public Service Commission is responsible for administering programs and enforcing rules and regulations that facilitate competition, maintain quality voice service, and ensure that all Nebraskans have access to quality telecom and information services at affordable and comparable rates.

In this edition of the PSC Digest, we'll explore the department's role when it comes to telecommunications.

"Our Department's philosophy is to provide the citizens of Nebraska with access to telecom services, regardless of income, location, or other limitations, and to oversee a regulatory environment for telecom carriers that allows for fair competition and provisions of services," Cullen Robbins, Director, PSC Telecom/NUSF Department.

The telecommunications side of the Telecom/NUSF Department has two primary functions: to regulate carriers that provide telecom service, and to provide assistance to the public to ensure they have access to the telecom services that they need.

The former is accomplished through certification of carriers, oversight of agreements between carriers and management of processes that involve carriers and require oversight and/or transparency with the public.

The latter is accomplished generally through management of customer complaints, and through programs that provide services to individuals that require special equipment to communicate due to hearing loss.

The department also regulates Private Water Companies and Automatic Dialing-Announcing Devices.

MEET YOUR TELECOM/NUSF DEPARTMENT TEAM

The Telecom/NUSF Department is under the leadership of Director Cullen Robbins. Robbins has been at the helm of the department since 2016 and has worked at the Commission for seven years.

Prior to his work with the PSC, he was a GIS Analyst with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Robbins holds a Bachelor Degree from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and a Master's Degree from UNL.

He oversees an eight person department including an Accountant, Economic/Data Analyst, Policy Analyst, GIS Specialist, NTAP Manager, Consumer Advocate and two Administrative Assistants.



Cullen Robbins Dir.
Telecom/NUSF Dept.



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Consumer Advocate



Brandy Zierott
Admin Assistant



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Department Duties Are Wide Ranging

The list of responsibilities for the Telecom side of the department is a long one. At the beginning of each new year the department updates annual report filings from 400-plus carriers with multiple authorities. The months long process requires mailings, emails and many contacts with carriers to ensure the information needed is received by the April 30 deadline.

A Communication Information Registry is also kept by the department. There are currently 288 companies providing wireless, VoIP, satellite, Internet, DSL, dark fiber, and/or paging in Nebraska. These applications are processed and a database is kept and updated on a daily basis.

A variety of applications are also handled, ranging from new authorities, to interconnection agreements, boundary changes and commission actions to name just a few.

Department Duties Are Wide Ranging Continued...

Auto dialer applications & scripts are submitted and reviewed by department staff as are annual report filings from Private Water Companies.

As you can see in this thumbnail sketch the staff is kept on its toes with a lot going on, in an ever changing environment.

Find about more about the services available by visiting the [Telecom/NUSF page](#) of the [PSC website](#).



Staff Longevity Provides Perspective on Change

A lot has changed in the 32 years Cheryl Elton has been with the Public Service Commission (PSC). When she first started at the Commission there were only three departments: Transportation, Grain, and Communications. Since then, the Commission has added NUSF, Natural Gas, Housing/RV, and State 911.

"Back in the late 80's, early 90's it seemed like filing cabinets outnumbered people at the agency," Elton said. "That's not the case anymore, as you can imagine quite a bit of remodeling has taken place in order to accommodate a growing staff."

Elton started her career at the PSC in the Transportation department before making the move to Communications where she has been for the past 24 years. During that time, the department has undergone restructuring, merging with NUSF. The Telecom/NUSF department has grown from six to nine staff members.

Performing her duties has also gotten easier. Elton has gone from electric typewriters to one agency computer that used a floppy disk, to today's computers/laptops and multiple monitor setups, providing the latest technological advances designed to help the Commission run as efficiently as possible.

As a consumer advocate in the Telecom/NUSF department, Elton fields phone calls and emails from consumers in need of assistance or who have a complaint or question about their telecommunications services. Her role is to work with the industry and the consumer to find answers and solutions to their particular situation. She has seen complaints peak at 2,400 per year in 2000, to the current average of 300-400 a year. In addition to her consumer advocate role, Elton is one of the administrators of the PSC website and has in the past provided IT assistance to other staff as needed.

Elton said, "While a lot has changed, the one thing that has always remained the same is the dedication of the staff in advocating for the public we serve and the industries we regulate."

Providing Services For the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community Big Part of PSC Advocacy



The management of programs designed to provide communication support for hearing and speech impaired citizens is one of the key telecommunications components in the Telecom/NUSF department.

The agency provides oversight of the Nebraska Telephone Relay Service (TRS). TRS is a telecommunications service that allows individuals with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls.

There are a number of services offered through the Nebraska TRS, from the "traditional" Text-to-Voice TTY-based TRS, to Voice Carry Over (VCO) and Hearing Carry Over (HCO), Speech-to-Speech Relay, Shared Non-English Relay Services and Captioned Telephone Service (CapTel). The PSC offers all of these services through contractual arrangements with its relay provider.

There are also three forms of Internet Protocol or IP-related relay services: IP Captioned Telephone service, Internet-Protocol Service and Video Relay Service. The FCC provides regulatory oversight for these services which are funded by the Interstate TRS Fund.

Similar to other forms of abbreviated dialing, a person can dial 711 to connect to certain forms of TRS anywhere in the United States. This makes it easier for travelers to use TRS since they do not have to remember the TRS 10-digit access number in every state. Technological limitations however, do not allow for 711 access to internet-based forms of relay.

The Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Program (NSTEP) also falls under Telecom. NSTEP is an outreach program to the deaf and hard of hearing and speech disabled community through collaboration with the Nebraska Commission of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH).

A statewide voucher program, NSTEP provides financial assistance to qualified individuals to acquire specialized equipment. The equipment includes but is not limited to, amplified telephones, TTY's, signaling and receiving devices, loud ringers and other alerting systems. The program also allows speech disabled individuals to acquire Speech Generating Devices (SGDs), which facilitates synthesized voice communication.

Since 2007, the PSC has also had business arrangements in place to allow qualified individuals to acquire wireless devices from approved providers, which in Nebraska include Verizon, Sprint, Viaero Wireless, and U.S. Cellular.

To find out more about TRS and NSTEP and the services provided, visit the visit the [TRS/NSTEP page](#) of the PSC website.



January 2020 meeting of the TRS Advisory Committee- the seven member committee provides guidance to the Commission on the development, monitoring and promotion of the statewide TRS.

Promotion helps citizens learn about Caption Phone Service (CapTel)

Do you know someone, a relative or friend having difficulty hearing when using the phone? If so, they may be a candidate to receive a free CapTel phone through the state's equipment distribution program. The program is monitored by the PSC through the TRS.

Click the picture below to get more information. A big thank you to our industry sponsor Sprint for putting together this important public service announcement.



There's A Lot More To Share, So Stay Tuned...

As mentioned earlier, this edition of the Department Digest newsletter takes a quick look at the Telecommunications side of the PSC's Telecom/NUSF department. A big thank you to staff for contributing information for the articles.

Next quarter, the newsletter will explore the Nebraska Universal Service Fund or NUSF side of the Telecom/NUSF Department.

The Nebraska Public Service Commission regulates telecommunications carriers, natural gas jurisdictional utilities, major oil pipeline, railroad safety, household goods movers and passenger carriers, grain warehouses and dealers, construction of manufactured and modular homes and recreation vehicles, high voltage electric transmission lines, and private water company rates.

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