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PSC EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS FUND APPLICATIONS

The state Public Service Commission has extended the deadline to May 1 for Montana schools, libraries, health care providers and communities to apply for assistance from the state program that helps to fund access to advanced telecommunications services. The former deadline was February 1.

The Montana Universal Access Program, funded by a surcharge on intrastate telecommunications services, will provide \$250,000 in internet access funding assistance for fiscal year 1998 and \$500,000 for fiscal year 1999 for schools, libraries, health care providers, tribal colleges, and community public access points. The priority of the program is to ensure access to advanced telecommunications is available in each Montana community.

Qualified applicants will receive a 50-percent discount off of the telecommunications provider's lowest business rate for the transport cost of a high-speed, dedicated phone line. Discounts provided under the state program will be reduced by the amount of any federal discounts received by the applicant. The PSC will notify successful applicants of their approved discount amounts by June 1 and discount funds will be disbursed no later than June 30.

Applications for the Montana program are available from the PSC by calling Bonnie Lorang at 406-444-6191, or by writing to her at PO Box 202601, Helena MT 59620-2601. Applications may also be obtained electronically from the PSC's Internet web site at www.psc.mt.gov.

The deadline extension, as well as other issues related to the Universal Access Program, will be discussed when the PSC meets with the Montana Universal Access Program Oversight Board on February 11 at the PSC's offices in Helena.

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