

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

<b>IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF</b>	)	
<b>ASSURANCE WIRELESS USA, L.P., TO EXPAND ITS</b>	)	
<b>ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER</b>	)	
<b>DESIGNATED SERVICE AREA TO INCLUDE</b>	)	<b>Docket No. TC25-003</b>
<b>TRIBAL LANDS</b>	)	
	)	

**ASSURANCE WIRELESS' RESPONSES TO  
FIRST DISCOVERY REQUESTS OF  
SOUTH DAKOTA TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION (SDTA)**

<b>Request To:</b>	<b>Assurance Wireless USA, L.P.</b>
<b>Request From:</b>	<b>South Dakota Telecommunications Association</b>
<b>Date of Request:</b>	<b>June 6, 2025</b>
<b>Responses Due:</b>	<b>July 7, 2025</b>

1. For each request, identify each person who assisted in the preparation of these responses or who provided information for the purpose of preparing these responses.

Response: As to all of the requests, information was gathered by or at the direction of Robert Stanchina.

2. Why were Tribal lands excluded from the Assurance Application in TC24-002?

Response: Assurance Wireless' Application in Docket No. TC24-002 was filed in January 2024. One of the main reasons it was filed at that time was so that Assurance Wireless could continue to provide affordable service to Affordable Connectivity Program ("ACP") customers in South Dakota in light of the anticipated discontinuance of ACP in the late spring of 2024. At the time of filing the 2024 Application, Assurance Wireless had been holding preliminary conversations with Tribes and was evaluating whether to offer Lifeline on Tribal lands in South Dakota.<sup>1</sup> But at that time Assurance Wireless had not reached a formal agreement with any South Dakota Tribal communities. Recognizing the importance of Tribal engagement, Assurance Wireless accordingly did not seek eligible telecommunications carrier ("ETC") designation in that proceeding for Tribal lands in South Dakota. Since then, the Coalition of Large Tribes

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Application of Assurance Wireless USA, L.P., for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier for the Purpose of Offering Lifeline Service to Qualifying Customers*, Assurance Wireless' Responses to Staff's First Data Requests at Response to 1-62, Docket No. TC24-002 (March 5, 2024).

(“C.O.L.T.”) has endorsed Assurance Wireless’ current Application to expand Lifeline services to Tribal communities in South Dakota.<sup>2</sup>

3. Are there geographic areas within South Dakota’s Tribal lands, other than those shown on Exhibit 5 as “limited coverage,” wherein customers may experience service issues due to inadequate or unreliable coverage?
  - a. If “yes:” Specifically identify these areas.
  - b. If “yes:” Will you advise customers of these areas of inadequate coverage/service? If so, how, and when will you make customers or prospective customers aware of these areas?
  - c. If “yes;” Do you intend to offer service to individuals who reside in these areas? If so, explain why this is in the public interest.
  - d. If “yes;” How will Assurance fulfill its obligations pursuant to ARSD 20:10:32:43.01? That is, how will Assurance provide services to all customers making a reasonable request for services?

Response:

a. See Assurance Wireless’ response to Staff Data Request 1-43 in Docket No. TC24-002.<sup>3</sup> Generally there are no geographic areas in South Dakota’s Tribal Lands, in the areas where Assurance Wireless seeks ETC designation in this proceeding, where customers may experience service issues due to inadequate or unreliable coverage. The purpose of excluding the areas identified as “limited coverage” was to avoid such situations.

b. See Assurance Wireless’ response to Staff Data Request 1-44 in Docket No. TC24-002. There are no known areas of inadequate coverage/service within the requested ETC service area, so there is nothing to advise customers about.

c. Assurance Wireless intends to offer Lifeline service to customers who reside in the areas in which it seeks designation as an ETC. There are no known areas of inadequate coverage/service within the requested ETC service area identified in this docket, so there is no reason why offering service to customers in the requested ETC service area would be inconsistent with the public interest.

d. Objection: Assurance Wireless objects to Request 3.d because the information requested is not relevant to the Commission’s review of Assurance Wireless’ Application. The concept of providing service to all consumers making a reasonable request, as set forth in ARSD 20:10:32:43.01, is only capable of being applied in the context of ETCs that receive high-cost support (i.e., funds that are intended to be used, in part, to build out coverage or capacity).

---

<sup>2</sup> See *Application of Assurance Wireless USA, L.P., to Expand its Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Designated Service Area to Include Tribal Lands*, Application at Ex. 4, Docket No. TC24-003 (May 5, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Assurance Wireless’ responses to Staff Data Requests, and other documents from Docket No. TC24-002, were filed in Docket TC24-003 on June 12, 2025.

Without waiving the foregoing objection, notwithstanding the inapplicability of ARSD 20:10:32:43.01 to Assurance Wireless' provision of Lifeline service, Assurance Wireless provides service on a timely basis to all consumers making a reasonable request for service where wireless coverage is available. In its May 15, 2024 Order in Docket TC24-002, the Commission found that Assurance Wireless had committed to adhering to ARSD 20:10:32:43.01.<sup>4</sup> Assurance Wireless' commitment remains the same.

4. Why does Assurance have limited coverage in the labeled areas on Exhibit 5? In other words, what causes there to be limited coverage in these areas?

Response: The areas on Exhibit 5 labeled as having limited coverage correspond to locations where T-Mobile's network is currently unable to provide the level of service and signal reliability that Assurance Wireless considers necessary for ETC designation. These limitations are attributable to a variety of technical and geographic factors, including but not limited to: significant distance from existing cell towers, challenging terrain characteristics, and constraints related to available spectrum resources. These areas were accordingly excluded from the proposed ETC service area due to the inability to ensure a consistent and adequate quality of service in accordance with Assurance Wireless' standards and the expectations set forth in applicable regulatory guidelines.

5. List which South Dakota tribes are not members of C.O.L.T.

Response:

The table below lists the federally-recognized Tribes located in South Dakota and whether they are a member of C.O.L.T.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Member of C.O.L.T.?</b>
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Yes
Crow Creek Sioux Tribe	Yes
Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe	Yes
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe	Yes
Oglala Sioux Tribe aka Pine Ridge	Yes
Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Yes
Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Tribe aka Lake Traverse	Yes
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe	Yes
Yankton Sioux Tribe	No

<sup>4</sup> Assurance Wireless has requested the Commission take notice of this finding. *See Application of Assurance Wireless USA, L.P., for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier for the Purpose of Offering Lifeline Service to Qualifying Customers*, ORDER APPROVING JOINT STIPULATION; ORDER GRANTING PETITION FOR DESIGNATION AS AN ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER at 2, Docket No. TC24-002 (March 5, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> C.O.L.T.'s website lists only four of the South Dakota Tribes as members, but Assurance Wireless has confirmed with C.O.L.T. that the list there is not comprehensive.

6. Has Assurance provided information to the Tribes that are not members of C.O.L.T, regarding this application or Assurance's desire to provide service on Tribal lands?

Response: Yes. Assurance Wireless served a copy of the Application on all nine of the South Dakota Tribes. It also separately contacted the Yankton Sioux Tribe.

7. Other than through C.O.L.T, has Assurance had any direct communication with any of the South Dakota Tribes regarding its desire to provide service on Tribal land? If so, provide details including the contact person at the Tribe and the nature of the communication.

Response: Yes. Again, Assurance Wireless served a copy of the Application on all nine of the South Dakota Tribes. In addition, Assurance Wireless emailed Yankton Sioux Tribe Chief Robert Flying Hawk to describe its upcoming expansion of Lifeline service to Tribal communities in South Dakota and invited the Yankton Sioux Tribe to participate in the provision of Lifeline.

8. Do customer service complaints regarding coverage/service influence or otherwise contribute to the coverage information you provide to a prospective consumer seeking services? In other words, if an area becomes a known problem service area, do you use this information to inform a potential customer that resides in the same area of what he/she can expect if he/she signs up for services? If so, describe this process and provide any internal documents that set forth said process.

Response: See Assurance Wireless' responses to Staff Data Requests 1-43 and 1-44 in Docket No. TC24-002. There are no known "problem service areas" within the requested ETC service area, so there is nothing to advise customers about.

9. Explain what the Assurance "third-party distribution network" (see Exhibit 4) is, how it is used and what function the "third-party distribution network" will perform for Assurance in South Dakota on Tribal lands?

Response: Assurance Wireless' third-party distribution network consists of independent businesses that have entered into formal agreements with Assurance Wireless. Their primary role is to promote and educate consumers about the Lifeline program. These distributors are responsible for: (1) generating consumer interest in the Lifeline program, (2) providing education on program benefits and eligibility criteria, and (3) assisting individuals in determining whether they qualify for enrollment.

To fulfill these responsibilities, these businesses engage in direct, in-person outreach by deploying teams—commonly referred to as "feet on the street." These representatives operate from branded Assurance Wireless setups, including shirts, tents, tables, and tablecloths all bearing the Assurance Wireless identity, ensuring visibility and brand consistency during field operations. This is the function that it is anticipated that a third-party vendor, part of the third-party distribution network, will perform for Assurance Wireless on Tribal lands in South Dakota.

10. Exhibit 4 references a plan that Assurance entered into with C.O.L.T to jointly develop a “digital solution” aimed to educate consumers and facilitate enrollment. Has the “digital solution” been developed?
- a. If the “digital solution” has not been developed, when is development expected?
  - b. What is meant by “digital solution.” (e.g., digital advertisements, software, applications, etc.)
  - c. Why are additional tools, such as the referenced “digital solution,” needed to facilitate enrollment on Tribal lands?

Response: Assurance Wireless promotes its Lifeline services through a diverse array of media channels. These include, but are not limited to:

- Digital marketing through paid search, social media advertising, and other digital outreach efforts, distributed through major platforms such as Google, Bing, and Meta.
- Printed materials including direct mail campaigns, brochures, and collateral used by field sales agents in outreach activities.
- Targeted email communications aimed at educating and enrolling eligible participants.
- Direct mailing of informational and promotional mailings to prospective and current customers.

Marketing strategies are tailored by market, considering factors such as target demographics, available media options, and cost-effectiveness. However, the bulk of Assurance Wireless’s national marketing activities is concentrated on its official website, social media presence, digital marketing, and email communications.

On South Dakota Tribal lands, Assurance Wireless intends to deploy localized marketing efforts, especially in locations frequented by likely eligible Lifeline participants including community centers and Tribal offices. All promotional efforts are designed to direct potential customers to the Assurance Wireless website, which provides comprehensive information on Lifeline service benefits, eligibility requirements, and application guidance. Furthermore, it is anticipated that as Assurance Wireless deploys Lifeline service on South Dakota Tribal lands, C.O.L.T. and perhaps others will make suggestions about specifically identified and culturally appropriate communication channels to reach Tribal communities, ensuring inclusive and equitable access to Lifeline service information. Such channels are the “digital solution” referred to in Exhibit 4. Assurance Wireless does not assume that such channels are “needed” to facilitate enrollment on Tribal lands, but is open to such channels because it understands the need for appropriate Tribal engagement and cultural competence.

11. Name the “third-party vendor” that will employ Tribal land residents to market services on Tribal lands. See Application page 8, Section B.

Objection: Assurance Wireless objects to Request 11 because the information requested is not relevant to the Commission’s review of Assurance Wireless’ Application.

Response: Without waiving the foregoing Objection, see CONFIDENTIAL ATTACHMENT 1, which is submitted under separate cover subject to a request for confidential treatment pursuant to S.D. Admin. R. 20:10:1:41.

12. Has the above named “third-party vendor” been utilized by Assurance to “employ Tribal land residents to market services on Tribal Lands” in other states? If so, list the states and Tribal Nations.

Response: The third-party vendor identified in the response to Request 11 has worked with Assurance Wireless in various markets for approximately twelve years. It has worked with Assurance Wireless in South Dakota since last year’s designation in non-Tribal lands, with no known issues or complaints. But it has not worked with Assurance Wireless to market services on Tribal lands; Assurance Wireless’ application in this docket is the first time Assurance Wireless has sought to provide Lifeline in Tribal lands.

13. The Application states, that Assurance will coordinate with C.O.L.T, as it pertains to the “third-party vendor.” Specifically, how does Assurance anticipate C.O.L.T will assist or be involved in Assurance’s relationship with the “third-party vendor?”

Response: Assurance Wireless anticipates that C.O.L.T. will support the third-party vendor’s efforts to hire qualified residents from Tribal lands, ensuring local engagement and opportunities for community employment.

14. What activities or duties will the third-party vendor’s Tribal land resident employees perform?
- a. Does Assurance have any knowledge of how these employees are trained? If so, provide information on the “third-party vendor” training program.
  - b. Does Assurance take responsibility for the behavior of all individuals involved in enrolling consumers in the Assurance Lifeline program, whether direct employees of Assurance or a “third-party vendor” employee?

Response:

- a. Objection: Assurance Wireless objects to Request 14.a because the information requested is not relevant to the Commission’s review of Assurance Wireless’ Application.

Without waiving the foregoing Objection, see CONFIDENTIAL ATTACHMENT 1, which is submitted under separate cover subject to a request for confidential treatment pursuant to S.D. Admin. R. 20:10:1:41.

- b. Objection: Assurance Wireless objects to Request 14.b as vague and ambiguous, particularly the phrase “take responsibility.” Assurance Wireless further objects to Request 14.b because the information requested is not relevant to the Commission’s review of Assurance Wireless’ Application.

Without waiving the foregoing Objection, any failure to adhere to Assurance Wireless' Standards & Requirements or to follow legal requirements relating to ETC eligibility can result in accountability measures, which can include termination of the sales representative or of Assurance Wireless' relationship with the vendor. *See* Assurance Wireless' responses to Staff Data Requests 1-15 in Docket No. TC24-002. The NLAD and National Verifier check, which all Lifeline providers are required to use, have substantially minimized the opportunity for third-party vendors to make eligibility or other errors when working to sign up customers for the Lifeline program.

15. Will Assurance or its third-party vendor establish store fronts on Tribal land? If so, where will they be located?

Response: At present, it is not anticipated that Assurance Wireless or the third-party vendor will establish retail stores on Tribal land.

16. How advertising and outreach activities in Tribal areas will differ from Assurance's practices in non-Tribal areas?

Response: Assurance Wireless' Lifeline advertising and outreach activities are generally uniform across Tribal and non-Tribal areas. However, certain communications channels may be unique to Tribal lands or more effective in reaching Tribal communities. Assurance Wireless is committed to identifying and using these specific channels to ensure culturally appropriate and effective engagement, and it has asked C.O.L.T. for its suggestions.

17. Confirm that under Assurance's current authority in South Dakota it provides customers with 4.5 GB of high-speed data and the proposed offering in Tribal areas will include 6GB of high-speed data. Or provide corrections if this is inaccurate.

Response: Confirmed.

18. On page 3 of the Application, Assurance writes that consumers can provide their own phone or, "purchase a discounted phone." Does Assurance plan to sell "discounted phones" on Tribal land in South Dakota?

Response: As to all locations where it provides or seeks to provide Lifeline in South Dakota, Assurance Wireless consumers may either bring a device that is compatible with the T-Mobile network under the "Bring Your Own Phone" option or purchase a low-cost phone from Assurance Wireless.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Assurance Wireless currently offers two low-cost phone options priced at \$25. *See* <https://www.assurancewireless.com/phone-options>.

19. On page 3 of the Application, Assurance writes that consumers can provide their own phone or, “purchase a discounted phone.” Will the third-party vendor sell discounted phones on Tribal land in South Dakota?

Response: At present, selling devices is not part of the marketing activity that the third-party vendor will be engaged in, and Assurance Wireless believes it is unlikely this will change.

20. If granted ETC designation pursuant to the Application, does Assurance agree that the SD PUC should be authorized to resolve and/or adjudicate consumer complaints related to Assurance services?

Response: Yes. As confirmed in Docket TC24-002, Assurance Wireless agreed to cooperate with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission to resolve consumer complaints.<sup>7</sup>

21. Has USAC or the FCC, at any time in the last 5 years, found that Assurance or its parent company (T-Mobile USA, Inc.) violated any provision of law related to lifeline benefits? If so, provide a link to the USAC/FCC Order or findings.

Response: See Assurance Wireless’ Response to Staff Data Request 1-16 in Docket No. TC24-002.

22. Does Assurance agree to incorporate all “*representations and commitments made by Assurance both orally and in writing*” (See TC24-002 Commission Order) in docket TC24-002 into an Order granting expanded ETC authority in this docket? If not, identify the representations and commitments made in TC24-002 that Assurance wishes to exclude from this docket.

Response: Yes. Assurance Wireless’ ETC designation in Docket No. TC24-002 is already conditioned on those representations and commitments. In Section III of its Application in this Docket, Assurance Wireless asked the Commission to take official notice of the record in Docket No. TC24-002. Assurance Wireless is not aware of any representations and commitments made by it in Docket No. TC24-002 that would not be equally applicable as it expands its Lifeline service area to include the Tribal lands specified in the Application.

---

<sup>7</sup> See *Application of Assurance Wireless USA, L.P., for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier for the Purpose of Offering Lifeline Service to Qualifying Customers*, Assurance Wireless’ Responses to Staff’s First Data Requests at 11 (March 5, 2024).



## VERIFICATION

I, Robert Stanchina, am the Senior Director for Assurance Wireless USA, L.P. (“Assurance”) and I hereby state that the facts set forth in the foregoing responses of Assurance to the SDTA’s Data Requests are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

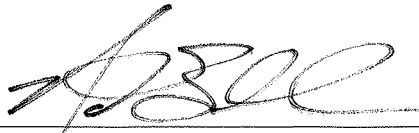
*Robert Stanchina*

Robert Stanchina

Senior Director, Assurance Wireless USA, L.P.

As to objections:

Dated this 2nd day of July, 2025



---

Andrew M. Carlson (MN Atty No. 284828)  
Nathan L. Buller (MN Atty No. 0387605, SD Atty No. 3766)  
Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP  
2200 IDS Center  
80 South Eighth Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
612-977-8400  
acarlson@taftlaw.com  
nbuller@taftlaw.com

and

William A. Haas  
Managing Corporate Counsel  
T-Mobile  
P.O. Box 10076  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52410  
630-290-7615  
William.Haas@T-Mobile.com

*Attorneys for Assurance Wireless USA, L.P.*