# BEFORE THE STATE CORPORATION COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF KANSAS

In the Matter of a General Investigation	)
Regarding the Effect of Federal Income	)
<b>Fax Reform on the Revenue Requirements</b>	)
Of Kansas Public Utilities and Request to	) Docket No. 18-GIMX-248-GIV
Issue an Accounting Authority Order	)
Requiring Certain Regulated Public	)
Utilities to Defer Effects of Tax Reform	)
to a Deferred Revenue Account	)

#### STAFF TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

JBN SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

PREPARED BY

**JUSTIN T. GRADY** 

**UTILITIES DIVISION** 

KANSAS CORPORATION COMMISSION

**November 6, 2018** 

- 1 Q. Please state your name and business address.
- 2 A. My name is Justin T. Grady and my business address is 1500 Southwest
- 3 Arrowhead Road, Topeka, Kansas, 66604.

- 5 Q. Are you the same Justin Grady that contributed to the Report and
- 6 Recommendation in this Docket on December 14, 2017?
- 7 A. Yes.

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- 9 Q. What is the purpose of your testimony?
- 10 A. I am testifying on behalf of the Staff of the Kansas Corporation Commission
- 11 (Staff and Commission, respectively) in support of the settlement of the issues
- outlined in the Settlement Agreement (Agreement) between J.B.N. Telephone
- 13 Company, Inc. (JBN), Staff, and the Citizens' Utility Ratepayer Board (CURB)
- 14 (collectively, the Parties).<sup>1</sup>
- 15 My testimony will explain why the Commission should approve the
- Agreement because it is in the public interest. Specifically, I will:
- Provide background information about this Docket;
- Provide an overview and discussion of the Agreement;
- Discuss the standard of review used to guide the Commission in its
- 20 consideration of whether to accept the Agreement<sup>2</sup>; and
- Discuss the evidence in the record that supports the Agreement.

<sup>1</sup> *Joint Motion for Approval of Settlement Agreement Regarding J.B.N. Telephone Company, Inc.*, Docket No. 18-GIMX-248-GIV (October 29, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Order Approving Contested Settlement Agreement, Docket No. 08-ATMG-280-RTS, pp. 4-6 (May 12, 2008).

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#### **Background Information**

Q. Please provide a brief background of this Docket.

3 4 A. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) is a Congressional bill that amends the 5 Internal Revenue Code to reduce tax rates and modify policies, credits, and 6 deductions for individuals and businesses. The bill was initially passed in the 7 House of Representatives on November 16, 2017, and on December 2, 2017, the Senate passed its version of the bill. While the House and Senate bills were in 8 9 reconciliation conference meetings, it became widely anticipated that tax reform 10 would be signed by the President before the first of the upcoming year. 11 Therefore, in anticipation of the TCJA being signed into law, on December 12 14, 2017, Staff filed a Motion to Open a General Investigation and Issue Accounting Authority Order Regarding Federal Tax Reform (Staff's Motion). 13 14 Attached to Staff's Motion was a Report and Recommendation recommending the 15 Commission issue an Order addressing the following: 16 1) Opening a general investigation for the purposes of examining the 17 financial impact of anticipated federal income tax reform on regulated 18 public utilities operating in Kansas; 19 2) Requiring, through the use of an Accounting Authority Order (AAO), 20 certain regulated public utilities that are taxed at the corporate level to 21 track and accumulate in a deferred revenue account, with interest 22 compounded monthly at the most current Commission-approved customer 23 deposit interest rate, the reduction in their regulated cost of service that would occur in the event that a new lower federal income tax rate is signed into law. These deferrals should take effect at the same time as the new federal corporate tax rate change and the calculations should be performed using the cost of service data that were used to set the utilities' last Commission-approved revenue requirement; and

3) Confirming that the Commission's intention regarding the AAO is to preserve any potential tax benefits so that they may be evaluated in the context of a comprehensive evaluation of the reasonableness of the utilities' rates (or KUSF distributions), as well as notifying utilities that this portion of their rates (or KUSF distributions) should be considered interim subject to refund until the Commission has the opportunity to review the reasonableness of the utilities' rates (or KUSF distributions) on a comprehensive and case-by-case basis and confirming that the Commission intends to capture the reduction in Accumulated Deferred Income Tax (ADIT) balances that will occur in the event that a lower corporate federal income tax rate takes effect, over time, in a manner that comports with Internal Revenue Services (IRS) Tax Normalization Rules.

On December 22, 2017, the TCJA was signed into law, which, amongst other changes, reduced the federal corporate income tax rate from 35% to 21% beginning on January 1, 2018.<sup>3</sup> Also, on December 22, 2017, CURB filed a Petition to Intervene and a Response in Support of Staff's Motion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Public Law No. 115-97; Statute 131 Stat. 2054 (Dec. 22, 2017).

1 On January 2, 2018, and January 16, 2018, JBN, as part of the State 2 Independent Alliance, filed comments in response to Staff's R&R. 3 On January 18, 2018, the Commission issued its Order Opening General 4 Investigation and Issuing Accounting Authority Order Regarding Federal Tax 5 Reform. 6 On several occasions in the months following the Commission's Order, the 7 Parties met via teleconference to discuss the issues present in this case in an 8 attempt to reach agreement on the quantification of the financial impacts of the 9 new lower tax rate on JBN's operations and how the cost savings should be 10 passed on to the contributors of the KUSF. As a result of the discussions, the 11 Parties were able to reach an agreement. 12 13 **Terms of the Settlement Agreement** 14 Q. Please discuss in detail the provisions of the Agreement. A. The provisions of the Agreement are as follows:

- 15
- 16 As required by the Commission's January 18, 2018, Order in this 17 Docket, JBN has been accumulating in a deferred revenue account the 18 difference between: (1) the cost of service as approved by the 19 Commission in its most recent KUSF Docket, Docket No. 13-JBNT-20 437-KSF (13-437 Docket); and (2) the cost of service that would have 21 resulted had the provision for federal income taxes been based upon the 22 corporate income tax rate approved in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

("TCJA"), plus a 1.62% annual interest rate reflecting the current Commission approved interest rate paid on customer deposits.

- JBN shall refund the above referenced regulatory liability to the KUSF through a one-time reduction in payment from GVNW to JBN in the amount of \$14,137 for October 2018, with the reduction occurring in the Company's support received on or before December 1, 2018. This one-time reduction in KUSF payment shall serve to release JBN from any further obligation associated with the tax reform regulatory liability recorded from January 1, 2018, through October 31, 2018. The one-time payment amount was reduced from the annual deferral amount calculated to reflect the partial year from January 1, 2018, through October 31, 2018, and to reflect a compromise between the Parties. This compromise recognizes the administrative cost savings and expediency of JBN's Agreement to immediately reduce its KUSF support instead of requiring a full KUSF audit proceeding to implement the reduction in support.
- To reflect the ongoing reduction in federal taxes embedded in JBN's KUSF support, JBN's annual KUSF support shall be reduced by \$28,275 annually beginning with the KUSF support for November 2018, paid on or before January 1, 2019

In the event that there are material changes in federal tax law that affect JBN between now and its next KUSF determination proceeding, Staff and CURB agree to work with JBN in good faith to review the impact of the change in federal tax law on JBN's financial results. In the event that the change in federal tax results in a material impact on JBN's financial results, Staff and CURB agree to recommend to the Commission extraordinary regulatory relief consistent with K.S.A. 66-2008(e) to capture the impact of the change in federal tax liability. This extraordinary regulatory relief may include the implementation of deferral accounting through an Accounting Authority Order and/or the implementation of a change in JBN's KUSF support outside of a full KUSF determination proceeding.
 JBN will establish a regulatory liability to account for and capture

- JBN will establish a regulatory liability to account for and capture the impact of the TCJA on the utility's excess ADIT that exists as of December 31, 2017, and will provide evidence of such to Staff upon request.
- Joint Movants have agreed to defer any issues regarding the impact of the TCJA on the utility's excess ADIT to JBN's next general rate case or KUSF determination proceeding.
- Joint Movants also agree JBN will not start amortizing the abovereferenced excess ADIT until it is reflected in rates or KUSF support as approved by the Commission in JBN's next general rate case or KUSF

1 determination proceeding. JBN is not bound by any particular date for a 2 future rate case or KUSF determination. 3 Paragraphs eight through twelve contain typical language often found 4 in Settlements of this type preserving the rights of the Parties and the 5 Commission for future proceedings not involving JBN, or in the event 6 that the Settlement agreement in this Docket is not approved. 7 8 The Commission's Standard of Review for Settlement Agreements 9 Q. Has the Commission previously used factors or standards to review a 10 settlement agreement? 11 A. Yes. The Commission's Order in Docket No. 08-ATMG-280-RTS (08-280 12 Docket) discusses five factors, or standards, and multiple agreements have been reviewed by the Commission using the five factors since that Order.<sup>4</sup> These five 13 14 standards are as follows: 15 1. Whether there was an opportunity for the opposing party to be heard on 16 their reasons for opposition to the Agreement; 17 2. Whether the Agreement is supported by substantial competent evidence in 18 the record as a whole; 19 3. Whether the Agreement conforms to applicable law; 20 4. Whether the Agreement results in just and reasonable rates; and 21 5. Whether the results of the Agreement are in the public interest. 22 Each of these five factors is discussed individually below.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Order Approving Contested Settlement Agreement, 08-280 Docket, p. 5 (May 12, 2008).

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#### **Support for the Settlement Agreement**

the terms of the Agreement.

- 2 3 Q. Please address whether each party had an opportunity to be heard on its 4 reasons for opposing the Agreement. 5 A. The Agreement presented to the Commission is a unanimous agreement, as the 6 Parties either support or do not oppose approval of the Agreement. All parties 7 having an interest in JBN's tax savings plan participated in settlement discussions 8 and were able to reach an agreement that identifies a one-time amount for JBN to 9 distribute to the KUSF for the tax savings achieved from January 1, 2018, through 10 October 31, 2018, and requires JBN to reduce its ongoing KUSF support by the 11 full amount of tax savings as calculated in accordance with the Commission's 12 January 18, 2018 Order in this Docket. Therefore, this factor has been met as 13 each party has been represented, has had an opportunity to be heard, and agree to
  - It should be noted that the Agreement limits its applicability to only JBN and is not binding or precedential to the tax savings refund plans submitted by other utilities. Furthermore, should any other party wish to be heard, it can file a response to the Joint Motion.

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- Q. Please address whether the Agreement is supported by substantial competent evidence in the record as a whole.
- 22 A. The Agreement is supported by substantial competent evidence in the record as a 23 whole. The record as a whole includes JBN's Application and direct testimony,

Staff's direct testimony, JBN's rebuttal testimony and a Commission Order filed in support of the settlement amount resulting from JBN's last KUSF determination proceeding, Docket No. 13-JBNT-437-KSF (13-437 Docket), which the Parties agree is the basis of the recalculation of the KUSF draw. Additionally, Staff is submitting pre-filed testimony in support of this Agreement. These past and present filed positions constitute the body of evidence that the Commission would rely on to make a determination of the issues presented if this were to go to a fully-litigated evidentiary hearing. It is Staff's position that the terms of this Agreement complies with all the instructions set forth in the Order issued by the Commission in this Docket, is based on the record as a whole, and are commensurate with what could be expected if the case were to be fully litigated.

# Q. How was the one-time KUSF reduction amount of \$14,137 and the ongoing

#### **KUSF reduction amount of \$28,275 arrived at the Parties?**

A. Staff quantified the impact of the new lower tax rates by taking the difference between the cost of service approved by the Commission in the 13-437 Docket and the cost of service that would have resulted had the provision for federal income taxes been based upon the corporate income tax rate approved in the TCJA. This calculation also included the impact of the change in Federal High Cost Loop Support that would be expected at that time, as a result of the change in federal income taxes. The result of that calculation, as presented in Appendix 1 attached to this testimony, resulted in an annual KUSF reduction in the amount of

\$28,275. This is the support for the calculation of the ongoing reduction in KUSF support.

Regarding the one-time KUSF reduction amount of \$14,137, this amount reflects a compromise between the parties and accounts for the proration of the total annual cost of service savings identified above for a ten-month period instead of twelve. For the period of January through October 2018, the prorated amount of the annual reduction would amount to \$23,562. Therefore, the one-time settlement amount of \$14,137 represents 60% of this prorated amount. There is no specific determination in the Settlement that supports this calculation; it is essentially a "black box settlement" amount that recognizes the time and cost savings of JBN agreeing to a reduction of its KUSF support without a full cost of service determination, as it would otherwise be entitled to under Kansas law. In addition to taking eight months to complete, a full KUSF determination proceeding can easily cost the KUSF fund in excess of \$100,000, so Staff views this one-time KUSF reduction amount as reasonable.

#### Q. Please address whether the Agreement conforms to applicable law.

A. I am not an attorney. However, it is my understanding that the Agreement does follow precedent for similar settlements in the past that have been executed in an effort to conform to applicable laws. All attempts were made to ensure that this Agreement conforms to applicable laws, including K.S.A 66-2008(e), and is presented in a fashion to allow the Commission to properly approve the Agreement.

#### Q. Does the Agreement result in just and reasonable rates?

A. The agreement does not affect JBN's tariff rates. Instead, the Agreement alters the amount of JBN's KUSF distribution. Pursuant to K.S.A 66-2008(e), JBN's KUSF support is required to be based on its embedded costs, revenue requirements, investments and expenses. By revising JBN's KUSF distribution to account for its new lower federal tax rate, this Agreement establishes a just and reasonable KUSF distribution that is based on JBN's embedded costs, revenue requirements, investments and expenses.

The agreed-upon reduction in KUSF is based upon the Commission-approved KUSF distribution in the 13-437 Docket, which at the time of approval were just and reasonable as they resulted in the proper balance between the Company's desire to have a reasonable assurance that it would earn sufficient revenues and cash flows to meet its financial obligations and the need to keep the KUSF contributions as low as possible for customers, while providing reliable local telephone service. However, with the passing of the TCJA, a subsequent revision to the Commission-approved KUSF distribution must be made to reflect the lower tax rate in order to ensure the KUSF distribution continues to be just and reasonable as was intended by the Commission Order in the 13-437 Docket. JBN's agreement to pass the savings resulting from the TCJA on to KUSF contributors in this Agreement, without a full cost of service determination, contributes to its KUSF distribution continuing to be just and reasonable.

## Q. Why is it reasonable to defer a decision on amortization of the excess

#### 2 deferred taxes to JBN's next KUSF proceeding?

3 A. As part of the Agreement, the Parties agree to defer many issues regarding the 4 amount of tax savings related to excess ADIT to JBN's next KUSF determination. 5 Until such time, JBN will establish a regulatory liability to account for and 6 capture the tax savings related to the excess deferred taxes. This regulatory 7 liability will not be amortized until the KUSF proceeding. This approach is 8 reasonable because it ensures that customers will continue to realize the benefit 9 associated with the excess deferred taxes as an offset to rate base. If ADIT is 10 reduced, rate base will increase, reflecting less of an ADIT rate base offset (lower 11 cost free capital). Therefore, until the excess deferred taxes are reflected in JBN's 12 KUSF determination case, customers will continue to receive the time value of 13 money associated with the excess deferred taxes today because they serve as an

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offset to rate base.

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#### Q. Does Staff believe the results of the Agreement are in the public interest?

A. Yes. There were multiple interests represented by the Parties involved in the Agreement with CURB representing the interests of residential and small general service ratepayers, JBN representing the interest of its management and shareholders, and Staff attempting to balance each of those interests while representing the interests of the public generally. The fact that these varied interests were able to collaborate and present a unanimous resolution of the issues discussed in this case strongly indicates the public interest standard has been met.

I	Generally speaking, the public interest is served when customers are protected
2	from unnecessarily high prices, discriminatory prices and/or unreliable service.
3	More specifically, it is Staff's opinion that the Agreement meets the public
4	interest because:
5	• It is in the public interest to pass back savings to KUSF contributors as
6	soon as possible, and this Agreement establishes a process and procedures
7	to accomplish that;
8	• Each of the Parties represented their respective interests by putting time,
9	thought, and analysis into deriving a tax savings process it found
10	reasonable; and
11	• If this Agreement is approved, the Parties would avoid the costly and
12	time-consuming process of a fully-litigated hearing. It is in the public
13	interest to avoid these costs if possible, and this Agreement accomplishes
14	this result.
15	
16	Q. Should the Commission accept the Agreement as a reasonable resolution of
17	the issues in this Docket?
18	A. Yes, the Agreement represents a reasonable resolution of the issues in this
19	Docket, will result in a just and reasonable KUSF distribution, is in the public
20	interest, is supported by substantial competent evidence in the record, and falls
21	within the realm of reasonable debate and the zone of reasonableness.
22	Q. Does this conclude your testimony?
23	A. Yes, thank you.

# JBN TELEPHONE COMPANY, INC. DOCKET NO. 18-GIMX-248-GIV PRESENTATION OF REVENUE REQUIREMENT CHANGE FROM TAX REFORM UTILIZING THE TEST YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2011

			RECALCULATED
		13-JBNT-437-KSF	with TAX REFORM
		Total	Total
		Staff	Staff
Line		Adjusted	Adjusted
No.	Description	Intrastate	Intrastate
* * * * :	* **********************	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *	* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
1	PROFORMA RATE BASE	\$1,799,985	\$1,804,157
2	STAFF RATE OF RETURN	7.7973%	7.7973%
3	OPERATING INCOME REQUIRED	140,350	140,676
4	TOTAL REVENUES (INCLUDING HIGH COST LOOP SUPPORT)	1,135,089	1,155,758
5	OPERATING FEDERAL INCOME TAXES	(135,141)	(79,459)
6	TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	1,350,503	1,407,622
7	PROFORMA OPERATING INCOME	(215,414)	(251,864)
8	NET PROFORMA REVENUE INCREASE / (DECREASE)	355,764	392,540
9	NET TO GROSS MULTIPLIER	1.572205	1.352882
10	GROSS PROFORMA REVENUE INCREASE / (DECREASE)	\$559,334	\$531,060
11	CHANGE IN REVENUE REQUIREMENT		(\$28,275)

STATE OF KANSAS	)
	) ss.
COUNTY OF SHAWNEE	)

### **VERIFICATION**

Justin T. Grady, being duly sworn upon his oath deposes and says that he is the Chief Auditor for the State Corporation Commission of the State of Kansas, that he has read and is familiar with the foregoing *Staff Testimony in Support of JBN Settlement Agreement* and that the statements contained therein are true and correct to the best of his knowledge, information and belief.

Justin T. Grady

Chief Auditor, Utilities Division State Corporation Commission of the State of Kansas

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 6th day of November, 2018.



Notary Public

My Appointment Expires: August 17, 2019

#### 18-GIMX-248-GIV

I, the undersigned, certify that a true and correct copy of the above and foregoing Staff Testimony in Support of JBN Settlement Agreement was served by electronic service on this 6th day of November, 2018, to the following:

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18-GIMX-248-GIV

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18-GIMX-248-GIV

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18-GIMX-248-GIV

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