

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Consumer Telcom, Inc.	)	IC Nos. 09-S0296934
	)	09-S0297155
Complaints Regarding	)	09-S0297184
Unauthorized Change of	)	10-S002671
Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier	)	10-S003035
	)	10-S0297631
	)	10-S2684385
	)	10-S2684445
	)	10-S2805673
	)	11-S2938760
	)	11-S3021475
	)	11-S3150058
	)	11-S3215719
	)	12-S3352968

ORDER

Adopted: June 26, 2012

Released: July 2, 2012

By the Deputy Chief, Consumer Policy Division, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau:

1. In this Order, we consider the complaints¹ alleging that Consumer Telcom, Inc., (CTI) changed Complainants' telecommunications service providers without obtaining authorization and verification from Complainants in violation of the Commission's rules.² We conclude that CTI's actions did result in unauthorized changes in Complainants' telecommunications service providers and we grant Complainants' complaints.

2. In December 1998, the Commission released the *Section 258 Order* in which it adopted rules to implement Section 258 of the Communications Act of 1934 (Act), as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act).³ Section 258 prohibits the practice of

¹ See Appendix.

² See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1100 – 64.1190.

³ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a); Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996); *Implementation of the Subscriber Carrier Selection Changes Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996; Policies and Rules Concerning Unauthorized Changes of Consumers' Long Distance Carriers*, CC Docket No. 94-129, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, 14 FCC Rcd 1508 (1998) (*Section 258 Order*), *stayed in part*, *MCI WorldCom v. FCC*, No. 99-1125 (D.C. Cir. May 18, 1999); First Order on Reconsideration, 15 FCC Rcd 8158 (2000); *stay lifted*, *MCI WorldCom v. FCC*, No. 99-1125 (D.C. Cir. June 27, 2000); Third Report and Order and Second Order on Reconsideration, 15 FCC Rcd 15996 (2000), Errata, DA No. 00-2163 (rel. Sept. 25, 2000), Erratum, DA No. 00-2192 (rel. Oct. 4, 2000), Order, FCC 01-67 (rel. Feb. 22, 2001); Third Order on Reconsideration and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making, 18 FCC Rcd 5099 (2003); Order, 18 FCC Rcd 10997 (2003); Fourth Report and Order, 23 FCC Rcd 493 (2008). Prior to the adoption of Section 258, the Commission had taken various steps to address the slamming problem. See, e.g., *Policies and*

“slamming,” the submission or execution of an unauthorized change in a subscriber’s selection of a provider of telephone exchange service or telephone toll service.⁴ In the *Section 258 Order*, the Commission adopted aggressive new rules designed to take the profit out of slamming, broadened the scope of the slamming rules to encompass all carriers, and modified its existing requirements for the authorization and verification of preferred carrier changes. The rules require, among other things, that a carrier receive individual subscriber consent before a carrier change may occur.⁵ Pursuant to Section 258, carriers are absolutely barred from changing a customer's preferred local or long distance carrier without first complying with one of the Commission's verification procedures.⁶ Specifically, a carrier must: (1) obtain the subscriber's written or electronically signed authorization in a format that meets the requirements of Section 64.1130; (2) obtain confirmation from the subscriber via a toll-free number provided exclusively for the purpose of confirming orders electronically; or (3) utilize an independent third party to verify the subscriber's order.⁷

3. The Commission also has adopted liability rules. These rules require the carrier to absolve the subscriber where the subscriber has not paid his or her bill. In that context, if the subscriber has not already paid charges to the unauthorized carrier, the subscriber is absolved of liability for charges imposed by the unauthorized carrier for service provided during the first 30 days after the unauthorized change.⁸ Where the subscriber has paid charges to the unauthorized carrier, the Commission’s rules require that the unauthorized carrier pay 150% of those charges to the authorized carrier, and the authorized carrier shall refund or credit to the subscriber 50% of all charges paid by the subscriber to the unauthorized carrier.⁹ Carriers should note that our actions in this order do not preclude the Commission from taking additional action, if warranted, pursuant to Section 503 of the Act.¹⁰

4. We received Complainants’ complaints alleging that Complainants’

Rules Concerning Unauthorized Changes of Consumers' Long Distance Carriers, CC Docket No. 94-129, Report and Order, 10 FCC Rcd 9560 (1995), *stayed in part*, 11 FCC Rcd 856 (1995); *Policies and Rules Concerning Changing Long Distance Carriers*, CC Docket No. 91-64, 7 FCC Rcd 1038 (1992), *reconsideration denied*, 8 FCC Rcd 3215 (1993); *Investigation of Access and Divestiture Related Tariffs*, CC Docket No. 83-1145, Phase I, 101 F.C.C.2d 911, 101 F.C.C.2d 935, *reconsideration denied*, 102 F.C.C.2d 503 (1985).

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120.

⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120(c). Section 64.1130 details the requirements for letter of agency form and content for written or electronically signed authorizations. 47 C.F.R. § 64.1130.

⁸ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1160. Any charges imposed by the unauthorized carrier on the subscriber for service provided after this 30-day period shall be paid by the subscriber to the authorized carrier at the rates the subscriber was paying to the authorized carrier at the time of the unauthorized change. *Id.*

⁹ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1170.

¹⁰ See 47 U.S.C. § 503.

telecommunications service providers had been changed to CTI without Complainants' authorization.¹¹ Pursuant to Sections 1.719 and 64.1150 of our rules,¹² we notified CTI of the complaints and CTI responded.¹³ CTI states that authorizations were received and confirmed thru third party verifications (TPVs). We have reviewed the TPVs that CTI submitted with its responses. The Commission's rules require that the verification elicit, amongst other things, confirmation that the person on the call is "authorized to make the carrier change."¹⁴ In each of the TPVs at issue, the verifier instead asks whether the person on the call "has the authority to make changes to your long distance service." A switch from one carrier to another carrier differs from merely making changes to the customer's service.¹⁵ As we emphasized in the *Fourth Report and Order*, "any description of the carrier change transaction...shall not be misleading and verifiers should convey explicitly that "the consumers will have authorized a carrier change, and not for instance an upgrade in existing service (emphasis added)."¹⁶ We find that CTI's actions were in violation of our carrier change rules, and we discuss CTI's liability below.¹⁷

5. CTI must remove all charges incurred for service provided to Complainants for the first thirty days after the alleged unauthorized change in accordance with the Commission's liability rules.¹⁸ We have determined that Complainants are entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and that neither the Complainants authorized carrier nor CTI may pursue any collection against Complainants for those charges.¹⁹ Any charges imposed by CTI on the subscribers for service provided after this 30-day period shall be paid by the subscribers to the authorized carrier at the rates the subscribers were paying to the authorized carriers at the time of unauthorized change of telecommunications service provider.²⁰

¹¹ See Appendix.

¹² 47 C.F.R. § 1.719 (Commission procedure for informal complaints filed pursuant to Section 258 of the Act); 47 C.F.R. § 64.1150 (procedures for resolution of unauthorized changes in preferred carrier).

¹³ See Appendix.

¹⁴ See 47 C.F. R. § 64.1120(c)(3)(iii).

¹⁵ See *Consumer Telcom, Inc.; Complaints Regarding Unauthorized Change of Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier*, IC Nos. 09-S0295686 and 09-S0295918, Order on Reconsideration, DA 12-801, CGB (rel. May 22, 2012) ("the verifier's question, "Do you have authority to make changes to your long distance service?" did not confirm that the person was authorizing a change that would result in receiving service *from a different carrier*").

¹⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120(c)(3)(iii); *Fourth Report and Order*, 23 FCC Rcd 493 (2008).

¹⁷ If any Complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution of this complaint, such Complainant may file a formal complaint with the Commission pursuant to Section 1.721 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 1.721. Such filing will be deemed to relate back to the filing date of such Complainant's informal complaint so long as the formal complaint is filed within 45 days from the date this order is mailed or delivered electronically to such Complainant. See 47 C.F.R. § 1.719.

¹⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1160(b).

¹⁹ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1160(d).

²⁰ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1160.

6. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to Section 258 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. § 258, and Sections 0.141, 0.361 and 1.719 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 0.141, 0.361, 1.719, the complaints filed against Consumer Telcom, Inc., ARE GRANTED.

7. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, pursuant to section 64.1170(d) of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(d), Complainants are entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and neither the CTI nor the authorized carriers may pursue any collection against Complainants for those charges.

8. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Order is effective upon release.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Nancy A. Stevenson, Deputy Chief
Consumer Policy Division
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau

APPENDIX

INFORMAL
COMPLAINT
NUMBER

DATE OF
COMPLAINT

DATE OF
RESPONSE

09-S0296934	October 6, 2009	November 12, 2011
09-S0297155	November 23, 2009	December 21, 2009
09-S0297184	December 2, 2009	January 8, 2010
10-S002671	January 6, 2010	February 10, 2010
10-S003035	October 25, 2010	December 10, 2010
10-S0297631	January 6, 2010	April 29, 2010
10-S2684385	June 17, 2010	July 23, 2010
10-S2684445	June 15, 2010	July 22, 2010
10-S2805673	September 27, 2010	November 4, 2010
11-S2938760	January 21, 2011	February 25, 2011
11-S3021475	March 14, 2011	April 14, 2011
11-S3150058	June 21, 2011	August 5, 2011
11-S3215719	September 13, 2011	October 14, 2011
12-S3352968	March 15, 2012	April 19, 2012