

In the Matter of )  
 )  
Verizon ) IC No. 12-S3319579  
 )  
Complaint Regarding )  
Unauthorized Change of )  
Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier )

**Released: July 23, 2013**

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).<sup>3</sup> Section 258 prohibits the practice of “slamming,” the submission or execution of an unauthorized change in a subscriber’s selection of

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a provider of telephone exchange service or telephone toll service.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

4. We received Complainant's complaint on February 1, 2012, alleging that Complainant's telecommunications service provider had been changed to Verizon without Complainant's authorization. Pursuant to Sections 1.719 and 64.1150 of our rules,<sup>11</sup> we notified

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<sup>4</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

<sup>5</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120.

<sup>6</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.*

<sup>9</sup> See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1170.

<sup>10</sup> See 47 U.S.C. § 503.

<sup>11</sup> 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).

Verizon of the complaint and Verizon responded on March 9, 2012.<sup>12</sup> Verizon admits that a third party verification (TPV) or letter of agency (LOA) was not found for the changes, as required by our rules.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we find that Verizon's actions resulted in an unauthorized change of Complainant's telecommunications service provider, and we discuss Verizon's liability below.<sup>14</sup>

5. Pursuant to Section 64.1170(b) our rules, Verizon must forward to Metropolitan Telecommunications an amount equal to 150% of all charges paid by the subscriber to Verizon along with copies of any telephone bills issued from Verizon to the Complainant.<sup>15</sup> Within ten days of receipt of this amount, Metropolitan Telecommunications shall provide a refund or credit to Complainant in the amount of 50% of all charges paid by Complainant to Verizon. Complainant has the option of asking Metropolitan Telecommunications to re-rate Verizon charges based on Metropolitan Telecommunications rates and, on behalf of Complainant, seek from Verizon, any re-rated amount exceeding 50% of all charges paid by Complainant to Verizon. Verizon must also send a notice to the Commission, referencing this Order, stating that it has given a refund or credit to Complainant.<sup>16</sup> If Metropolitan Telecommunications has not received the reimbursement required from Verizon within 45 days of the release of this Order, Metropolitan Telecommunications must notify the Commission and Complainant accordingly. Metropolitan Telecommunications also must notify the Complainant of his or her right to pursue a claim against Verizon for a refund of all charges paid to Verizon.<sup>17</sup>

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 complaint filed by Complainant against Verizon IS GRANTED.

7. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, pursuant to Section 64.1170(b) of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(b), that Verizon must forward to Metropolitan Telecommunications an amount equal to 150% of all charges paid by the subscriber along with copies of any telephone bills issued from the company to the Complainant within ten (10) days of the release of this order.

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<sup>12</sup> Verizon's Response to Informal Complaint No. IC 12-S3319579, received March 9, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120-64.1130.

<sup>14</sup> If Complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution of this complaint, 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 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 Complainant. See 47 C.F.R. § 1.719.

<sup>15</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(b)(1)(2).

<sup>16</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(c).

<sup>17</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(e).

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

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

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