

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Network Service Billing, Inc.	)	IC No. 13-S3711247
	)	
Complaint Regarding	)	
Unauthorized Change of	)	
Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier	)	

Released: September 23, 2014

1. In this Order, we consider the complaint¹ alleging that Network Service Billing Inc. (NSBI) changed Complainant's telecommunications service provider without obtaining authorization and verification from Complainant in violation of the Commission's rules.² We conclude that NSBI's actions violated the Commission's carrier change rules and we grant Complainant's complaint.

¹ Informal Complaint No. IC 13-S3711247, filed June 24, 2013.

² See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1100 – 64.1190.

11417

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 Complainant's complaint on June 24, 2013, alleging that Complainant's telecommunications service provider had been changed to NSBI without Complainant's authorization. Pursuant to Sections 1.719 and 64.1150 of the Commission's rules¹¹ we notified NSBI of the complaint and NSBI responded on August 9, 2013.¹² NSBI states

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.

¹¹ 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).

that authorization was received and confirmed through third party verification (TPV). 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."¹³ In the TPV at issue in this case, the verifier instead asks the person on the call, "Are you authorizing the change of your long distance service to Network Services Billing Inc. or NSBI?" An affirmative response does not establish whether the person was authorized to make the carrier change. A switch from one carrier to another carrier differs from merely making changes to the customer's phone services.¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ We find that NSBI's actions were in violation of our carrier change rules, and we discuss NSBI's liability below.¹⁶

5. NSBI must remove all charges incurred for service provided to Complainant for the first thirty days after the alleged unauthorized change in accordance with the Commission's liability rules.¹⁷ We have determined that Complainant is entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and neither their authorized carrier nor NSBI may pursue any collection against Complainant for those charges.¹⁸ Any charges imposed by NSBI on the subscriber for service provided after this 30-day period shall be paid by the subscriber at the rates the subscriber was paying to their authorized carrier at the time of the unauthorized change.¹⁹

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 against Network Service Billing Inc., IS GRANTED.

(Continued from previous page) _____

¹² NSBI's Response to Informal Complaint No. IC 13-S371124, received August 9, 2013.

¹³ See 47 C.F. R. § 64.1120(c)(3)(iii).

¹⁴ Cf. *Consumer Telcom, Inc.*, Order on Reconsideration, 27 FCC Rcd 5340 (CGB 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").

¹⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1120(c)(3)(iii); Fourth Report and Order, 23 FCC Rcd 493 (2008).

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1160(b).

¹⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1160(d).

¹⁹ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 64.1140, 64.1160.

7. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, pursuant to Section 64.1170(d) of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 64.1170(d), Complainant is entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and neither NSBI nor their authorized carrier may pursue any collection against Complainant 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