

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

In the Matter of)
AT&T) Complaint No. 4960379
Complaint Regarding)
Unauthorized Change of)
Subscriber's Telecommunications Carrier)

ORDER

Adopted: October 26, 2021

Released: October 27, 2021

By the Acting Chief, Consumer Policy Division, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau:

1. In this Order, we consider a complaint alleging that AT&T changed Complainant's telecommunications service provider without obtaining authorization and verification from Complainant as required by the Commission's rules. We conclude that AT&T's actions violated the Commission's slamming rules, and we therefore grant Complainant's complaint.

2. Section 258 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the Act), prohibits the practice of "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. The Commission's implementing rules require, among other things, that a carrier receive individual subscriber consent before a carrier change may occur. Specifically, a carrier must: (1) obtain the subscriber's written or electronically signed authorization in a format that satisfies our rules; (2) obtain confirmation from the subscriber via a toll-free number provided exclusively for the purpose of confirming orders electronically; or (3) utilize an appropriately qualified independent third party to verify the order. The Commission has also adopted rules to limit the liability of subscribers when an unauthorized carrier change occurs, and to require carriers involved in slamming practices to compensate subscribers whose carriers were changed without authorization.

1 See Informal Complaint No. 4960379 (filed Aug. 13, 2021); see also 47 CFR §§ 64.1100 – 64.1190.

2 47 U.S.C. § 258(a).

3 See 47 CFR § 64.1120.

4 See id. § 64.1120(c). Section 64.1130 details the requirements for letter of agency form and content for written or electronically signed authorizations. Id. § 64.1130.

5 These rules require the unauthorized carrier to absolve the subscriber where the subscriber has not paid his or her bill. 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. See id. §§ 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. Where the subscriber has paid charges to the unauthorized carrier, the Commission's rules require that the unauthorized carrier pay 150 percent of those charges to the authorized carrier, and the authorized carrier shall refund or credit to the subscriber 50 percent of all charges paid by the subscriber to the unauthorized carrier. See id. §§ 64.1140, 64.1170.

3. We received Complainant's complaint alleging that Complainant's telecommunications service provider had been changed from Global Crossing to AT&T in March of 2021 without Complainant's authorization.⁶ Pursuant to our rules, we notified AT&T of the complaint and directed AT&T "to provide any evidence of authorization from the consumer as required by our rules."⁷ AT&T responded, stating that as of August 27, 2021 (after the complaint was filed and served on AT&T), the Complainant's long distance carrier was Global Crossing.⁸ AT&T did not dispute that Complainant's carrier had been changed to AT&T and did not provide proof of authorization for the carrier switch, including a third-party verification recording. The failure of AT&T to provide proof of verified authorization is presumed to be clear and convincing evidence of a violation.⁹ Therefore, we find that AT&T's actions violated our slamming rules, and we discuss AT&T's liability below.¹⁰

4. AT&T 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.¹¹ We have determined that Complainant is entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and that neither the Complainant's authorized carrier nor AT&T may pursue any collection against Complainant for those charges.¹² Any charges imposed by AT&T on the Complainant for service provided after this 30-day period shall be paid by the Complainant to the authorized carrier at the rates the Complainant was paying the authorized carrier at the time of the unauthorized change of their telecommunications service provider.¹³

5. 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 CFR §§ 0.141, 0.361, 1.719, the complaint filed against AT&T IS GRANTED.

6. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, pursuant to section 64.1170(d) of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR § 64.1170(d), Complainant is entitled to absolution for the charges incurred during the first thirty days after the unauthorized change occurred and that AT&T may not pursue any collection against Complainant for those charges.

⁶ See Informal Complaint No. 4960379.

⁷ Informal Complaint No. 4960379 was served on AT&T on Aug. 18, 2021. See 47 CFR § 1.719 (Commission procedure for informal complaints filed pursuant to section 258 of the Act); *id.* § 64.1150 (procedures for resolution of unauthorized changes in preferred carrier).

⁸ See AT&T Response to Informal Complaint No. 4960379 (filed Sept. 13, 2021). After receiving AT&T's initial response, the Division e-mailed the company several times to request additional information about the carrier switch and to request a copy of the third-party verification recording (TPV). AT&T responded to each e-mail, but failed to provide any evidence of an authorized carrier switch, eventually stating that "no TPV info [was] available."

⁹ See 47 CFR § 64.1150(d).

¹⁰ If Complainant is unsatisfied with the resolution of his complaint, Complainant may file a formal complaint with the Commission pursuant to section 1.721 of the Commission's rules. *Id.* § 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 *id.* § 1.719.

¹¹ See *id.* § 64.1160(b).

¹² See *id.* § 64.1160(d).

¹³ See *id.* § 64.1140, 64.1160.

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

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Kristi Thornton
Acting Chief
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