

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Enforcement Bureau
Market Disputes Resolution Division
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Via Email and U.S. Mail

March 14, 2018

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Re: *CenturyLink Communications, LLC, and Level 3 Communications, LLC, v. Birch Communications, Inc., Docket No. 18-73, File No. EB-18-MD-002*

Counsel,

On March 9, 2018, CenturyLink Communications, LLC and Level 3 Communications, LLC (CenturyLink) and Birch Communications, Inc. (Birch) requested that the Commission enter their proposed Protective Order in the above-referenced docket.¹ The proposed Protective Order sets out procedures governing the treatment of “documents containing trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person and which is privileged or confidential.”

¹ Email from Chuck Steese, Counsel for CenturyLink Communications, LLC., File No. EB-17-MDIC-0001 (dated March 9, 2018).

Having reviewed the proposed Protective Order, we note that it is based largely upon the Model Protective Order approved by the Commission in *Examination of Current Policy Concerning the Treatment of Confidential Information Submitted to the Commission*, Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 24816, Appendix C (1998). Staff made minor changes to the Protective Order, which both parties agreed to.² A copy of the Protective Order, as modified, is attached.

We are satisfied that issuing the Protective Order at the parties' request will serve the public interest. Specifically, the Protective Order will ensure that, in addition to Commission staff, only the parties' counsel and authorized representatives will have access to privileged or confidential information. Accordingly, we hereby adopt the attached Protective Order.

This letter ruling is issued pursuant to Sections 4(i), 4(j), and 208 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. §§ 154(i), 154(j), 208, and authority delegated by Sections 0.111, 0.311, 1.729, and 1.731 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR §§ 0.111, 0.311, 1.729, 1.731.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Saks', is written over the printed name.

Lisa Saks
Assistant Division Chief
Market Disputes Resolution Division
Enforcement Bureau

² See Email from Thorn Rosenthal, Counsel for Birch Communications, Inc., (dated March 13, 2018); *see also* Email from Chuck Steese, Counsel for CenturyLink Communications, LLC and Level 3 Communications, LLC (dates March 13, 2018).

In the Matter of
CenturyLink Communications, LLC and Level 3 Communications, LLC
v.
Birch Communications, Inc.

Docket No. 18-73

PROTECTIVE ORDER

This Protective Order is intended to facilitate and expedite the review of documents containing trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person and which is privileged or confidential. It reflects the manner in which “Confidential Information,” as that term is defined herein, is to be treated. The Protective Order is not intended to constitute a resolution of the merits concerning whether any Confidential Information would be released publicly by the Commission upon a proper request under the Freedom of Information Act or other applicable law or regulation, including 47 CFR § 0.442.

1. Definitions.

a. Authorized Representative. “Authorized Representative” shall have the meaning set forth in Paragraph seven.

b. Commission. “Commission” means the Federal Communications Commission or any arm of the Commission acting pursuant to delegated authority.

c. Confidential Information. “Confidential Information” means (i) information submitted to the Commission by the Submitting Party that has been so designated by the Submitting Party and which the Submitting Party has determined in good faith constitutes trade secrets or commercial or financial information which is privileged or confidential within the meaning of Exemption 4 of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4); (ii) information submitted to the Commission by the Submitting Party that has been so designated by the Submitting Party and which the Submitting Party has determined in good faith falls within the terms of Commission orders designating the items for treatment as Confidential Information; and (iii) information that the Commission has allowed to be examined off-site and that otherwise complies with the requirements of this paragraph. Confidential Information includes additional copies of and information derived from Confidential Information.

d. Declaration. “Declaration” means Attachment A to this Protective Order.

e. Reviewing Party. “Reviewing Party” means a person or entity participating in this proceeding or considering in good faith filing a document in this proceeding. The definition of Reviewing Party does not include the Commission or Commission staff.

f. Submitting Party. “Submitting Party” means a person or entity that seeks confidential treatment of Confidential Information pursuant to this Protective Order.

2. Claim of Confidentiality. The Submitting Party, may designate information as “Confidential Information” consistent with the definition of that term in Paragraph 1 of this Protective Order. The Commission may, *sua sponte* or upon petition, pursuant to 47 CFR §§ 0.459 & 0.461, determine that all or part of the information claimed as “Confidential Information” is not entitled to such treatment.

3. Procedures for Claiming Information is Confidential. Confidential Information submitted to the Commission shall be filed under seal and shall bear on the front page in bold print, “CONTAINS PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION - DO NOT RELEASE.” Confidential Information shall be segregated by the Submitting Party from all non-confidential information submitted to the Commission. To the extent a document contains both Confidential Information and non-confidential information, the Submitting Party shall designate the specific portions of the document claimed to contain Confidential Information and shall, where feasible, also submit a redacted version not containing Confidential Information..

4. Storage of Confidential Information at the Commission. The Secretary of the Commission or other Commission staff to whom Confidential Information is submitted shall place the Confidential Information in a non-public file. Confidential Information shall be segregated in the files of the Commission, and shall be withheld from inspection by any person not bound by the terms of this Protective Order, unless such Confidential Information is released from the restrictions of this Protective Order either through agreement of the parties, or pursuant to the order of the Commission or a court having jurisdiction.

5. Access to Confidential Information. Confidential Information shall only be made available to Commission staff, Commission consultants and to counsel to the Reviewing Parties, or if a Reviewing Party has no counsel, to a person designated by the Reviewing Party. Before counsel to a Reviewing Party or such other designated person designated by the Reviewing Party may obtain access to Confidential Information, counsel or such other designated person must execute the attached Declaration. Consultants under contract to the Commission may obtain access to Confidential Information only if they have signed, as part of their employment contract, a non-disclosure agreement or if they execute the attached Declaration.

6. Counsel to a Reviewing Party or such other person designated pursuant to Paragraph 5 may disclose Confidential Information to other Authorized Representatives to whom disclosure is permitted under the terms of paragraph 7 of this Protective Order only after advising such Authorized Representatives of the terms and obligations of the Protective Order. In addition, before Authorized Representatives may obtain access to Confidential Information, each Authorized Representative must execute the attached Declaration.

7. Authorized Representatives shall be limited to:
 - a. Counsel for the Reviewing Parties to this proceeding, including in-house counsel actively engaged in the conduct of this proceeding, and their associated attorneys, paralegals, clerical staff and other employees, to the extent reasonably necessary to render professional services in this proceeding;
 - b. Specified persons, including employees of the Reviewing Parties, requested by counsel to furnish technical or other expert advice or service, or otherwise engaged to prepare material for the express purpose of formulating filings in this proceeding; or
 - c. Any person designated by the Commission in the public interest, upon such terms as the Commission may deem proper. The term Authorized Representative shall not include the Commission or Commission staff.
8. Copies of Confidential Information. The Submitting Party shall provide a copy of the Confidential Material to Authorized Representatives upon request and may charge a reasonable copying fee not to exceed twenty-five cents per page. Authorized Representatives may make additional copies of Confidential Information but only to the extent required and solely for the preparation and use in this proceeding, Authorized Representatives must maintain a written record of any additional copies made and provide this record to the Submitting Party upon reasonable request. The original copy and all other copies of the Confidential Information shall remain in the care and control of Authorized Representatives at all times. Authorized Representatives having custody of any Confidential Information shall keep the documents properly secured at all times.
9. Filing of Declaration. Counsel for Reviewing Parties shall provide to the Submitting Party and the Commission with a copy of the attached Declaration for each Authorized Representative within five (5) business days after the attached Declaration is executed, or by any other deadline that may be prescribed by the Commission.
10. Use of Confidential Information. Confidential Information shall not be used by any person granted access under this Protective Order for any purpose other than for use in this proceeding (including any subsequent administrative or judicial review) unless otherwise ordered by the Commission or a court of competent jurisdiction, shall not be used for competitive business purposes, and shall not be used or disclosed except in accordance with this Protective Order. This shall not preclude the use of any material or information that is in the public domain or has been developed independently by any other person who has not had access to the Confidential Information nor otherwise learned of its contents.
- 11-2. Pleadings Using Confidential Information. Submitting Parties and Reviewing Parties may, in any pleadings that they file in this proceeding, reference the Confidential Information, but only if they comply with the following procedures:

a. Any portions of the pleadings that contain or disclose Confidential Information must be physically segregated from the remainder of the pleadings and filed under seal;

b. The portions containing or disclosing Confidential Information must be covered by a separate letter referencing this Protective Order;

c. Each page of any Party's filing that contains or discloses Confidential Information subject to this Protective Order must be clearly marked: "Confidential Information included pursuant to Protective Order, [cite proceeding];" and

d. The confidential portion(s) of the pleading, to the extent they are required to be served, shall be served upon the Secretary of the Commission, the Submitting Party, and those Reviewing Parties that have signed the attached Declaration. Such confidential portions shall be served under seal. They shall not be placed in the Commission's Public File unless the Commission directs otherwise (with notice to the Submitting Party and an opportunity to comment on such proposed disclosure). A Submitting Party or a Reviewing Party filing a pleading containing Confidential Information shall also file a redacted copy of the pleading containing no Confidential Information, which copy shall be placed in the Commission's public files. A Submitting Party or a Reviewing Party may provide courtesy copies of pleadings containing Confidential Information to Commission staff so long as the notation required by subsection c. of this paragraph is not removed.

e. The redacted version of a pleading shall bear on the front page the legend "PUBLIC VERSION" and shall clearly indicate where confidential material has been redacted from an individual page. If any pages are removed in their entirety to prevent disclosure of confidential information, the Submitting Party shall insert a placeholder that (a) identifies each omitted document by its page, exhibit, or appendix number, (b) includes a descriptive title for the omitted document, and (c) contains the words "CONFIDENTIAL MATERIALS OMITTED" below the descriptive title. The confidential version of a pleading shall identify any Confidential Information by including the legend "BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL" and "END CONFIDENTIAL" at the beginning and end of any such information.

12. Violations of Protective Order. Should a Reviewing Party that has properly obtained access to Confidential Information under this Protective Order violate any of its terms, it shall immediately convey that fact to the Commission and to the Submitting Party. Further, should such violation consist of improper disclosure or use of Confidential Information, the violating party shall take all necessary steps to remedy the improper disclosure or use. The Violating Party shall also immediately notify the Commission and the Submitting Party, in writing, of the identity of each party known or reasonably

suspected to have obtained the Confidential Information through any such disclosure. The Commission retains its full authority to fashion appropriate sanctions for violations of this Protective Order, including but not limited to suspension or disbarment of attorneys from practice before the Commission, forfeitures, cease and desist orders, and denial of further access to Confidential Information in this or any other Commission proceeding. Nothing in this Protective Order shall limit any other rights and remedies available to the Submitting Party at law or equity against any party using Confidential Information in a manner not authorized by this Protective Order.

13. Termination of Proceeding. Unless otherwise ordered by the Commission or a court of competent jurisdiction, within two weeks after final resolution of this proceeding (which includes any administrative or judicial appeals), Authorized Representatives of Reviewing Parties shall destroy or return to the Submitting Party all Confidential Information as well as all copies and derivative materials made. Authorized representatives shall certify in a writing served on the Commission and the Submitting Party that no material whatsoever derived from such Confidential Information has been retained by any person having access thereto, except that counsel to a Reviewing Party may retain two copies of pleadings submitted on behalf of the Reviewing Party and other attorney work product. Any confidential information contained in any copies of pleadings retained by counsel to a Reviewing Party or in materials that have been destroyed pursuant to this paragraph shall be protected from disclosure or use indefinitely in accordance with paragraphs 9 and 11 of this Protective Order unless such Confidential Information is released from the restrictions of this Protective Order either through agreement of the parties, or pursuant to the order of the Commission or a court having jurisdiction.

14. No Waiver of Confidentiality. Disclosure of Confidential Information as provided herein shall not be deemed a waiver by the Submitting Party of any privilege or entitlement to confidential treatment of such Confidential Information. Reviewing Parties, by viewing these materials: (a) agree not to assert any such waiver; (b) agree not to use information derived from any confidential materials to seek disclosure in any other proceeding; and (c) agree that accidental disclosure of Confidential Information shall not be deemed a waiver of any privilege.

15. Additional Rights Preserved. The entry of this Protective Order is without prejudice to the rights of the Submitting Party to apply for additional or different protection where it is deemed necessary or to the rights of Reviewing Parties to request further or renewed disclosure of Confidential Information.

16. Effect of Protective Order. This Protective Order constitutes an Order of the Commission and an agreement between the Reviewing Party, executing the attached Declaration, and the Submitting Party.

17. Authority. This Protective Order is issued pursuant to Sections 4(i) and 4(j) of the Communications Act as amended, 47 U.S.C. §§ 154(i), and (j) and 47 CFR § 0.457(d).

Attachment A

DECLARATION

In the Matter of

CenturyLink Communications, LLC and Level 3 Communications, LLC

v.

Birch Communications, Inc.

Docket No. _____

I, _____, hereby declare under penalty of perjury that I have read the Protective Order in this proceeding, and that I agree to be bound by its terms pertaining to the treatment of Confidential Information submitted by parties to this proceeding. I understand that the Confidential Information shall not be disclosed to anyone except in accordance with the terms of the Protective Order and shall be used only for purposes of the proceedings in this matter. I acknowledge that a violation of the Protective Order is a violation of an order of the Federal Communications Commission. I acknowledge that this Protective Order is also a binding agreement with the Submitting Party.

(signed) _____

(printed name) _____

(representing) _____

(title) _____

(employer) _____

(address) _____

(phone) _____

(date) _____