

Media Contact:

Will Wiquist, (202) 418-0509
will.wiquist@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release

**FCC ENFORCEMENT BUREAU, CENTURYLINK REACH
\$550,000 SETTLEMENT FOR UNAUTHORIZED CHARGES
ON CONSUMERS' BILLS**

Company Commits to Provide Refunds to Consumers and Stop Third-Party Billing

WASHINGTON, August 13, 2019—The Federal Communications Commission’s Enforcement Bureau today announced a settlement with CenturyLink to resolve an investigation into the company’s placement of unauthorized third-party charges and fees onto consumers’ bills. This practice, known as cramming, is unjust and unreasonable under the Communications Act. As part of the settlement, the company has agreed to pay \$550,000 to the U.S. Treasury and has committed to a compliance plan designed to protect consumers and prevent future cramming.

“Over the years, the FCC has done yeoman’s work in fighting cramming and getting major phone companies to stop this practice,” said Rosemary Harold, Chief of the Enforcement Bureau. “With today’s action, another major phone company will stop cramming and prevent unscrupulous third parties from adding fees to bills without prior express consent.”

During its investigation, the Enforcement Bureau reviewed complaints from CenturyLink customers. Consumers stated that they discovered unauthorized third-party charges on their CenturyLink bills and, in some cases, had difficulty getting timely refunds. Today’s settlement seeks to directly address these problems.

CenturyLink has agreed to cease billing for third parties, with certain narrow exceptions, and to implement a process for providing refunds or credits to customers with valid complaints about unauthorized charges. The settlement strengthens CenturyLink customers’ ability to dispute unauthorized charges, including ensuring that customers are not required to first contact the third-party company to be eligible to receive a refund or to pay a disputed fee until that dispute is resolved. CenturyLink will also allow customers to block future third-party charges and have available upon customers’ request all recent billing information related to third-party charges. In addition, CenturyLink commits to revise its processes, conduct staff training to avoid any further placement of unauthorized third-party charges on customers’ bills, and file regular compliance reports with the Commission.

Today’s settlement, formally known as a Consent Decree, is available at:

https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-19-700A1.pdf

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Media Relations: (202) 418-0500 / ASL: (844) 432-2275 / TTY: (888) 835-5322 / Twitter: @FCC / www.fcc.gov

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).