



NEWS FROM THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

FCC Acts to Bring More Uniform Approach to Handset Unlocking Rules

FCC Waives 2007 Rule that Incentivized Handset Theft and Fraud

WASHINGTON, January 12, 2026—The Federal Communications Commission today took action to bring a more uniform approach to its handset unlocking rules that will benefit consumers. The action also closes a loophole that sophisticated criminal networks and everyday lawbreakers alike have exploited to engage in illicit activity. Specifically, the FCC waived a 2007 rule that required one wireless carrier to unlock their handsets well earlier than standard industry practice, thus creating an incentive for bad actors to steal those handsets for purposes of carrying out fraud and other illegal acts.

Chairman Brendan Carr issued the following statement:

“Sophisticated criminal networks have exploited the FCC’s handset unlocking policies to carry out criminal acts—including transnational handset trafficking schemes and facilitating broader criminal enterprises like drug running and human smuggling. By waiving a regulation that incentivized bad actors to target one particular carrier’s handsets for theft, we now have a uniform industry standard that can help stem the flow of handsets into the black market.”

Additional Background Information:

Under the FCC’s 2007 [unlocking](#) requirements, Verizon is the only major provider that the FCC requires to unlock its handsets 60 days after activation, which is earlier than standard industry practice. The FCC extended this unique requirement in 2021 as a condition of Verizon’s acquisition of Tracfone. Verizon has stated that it “saw a spike in fraud of approximately 55% after TracFone moved from its earlier policy of a one-year lock to Verizon’s 60-day lock.”

Under today’s waiver [order](#) from the FCC’s Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, Verizon will, like its competitors, provide unlocking services in alignment with the [CTIA Consumer Code for Wireless Service](#), established in 2013. These voluntary unlocking standards cover disclosure, postpaid and prepaid unlocking policies, notice, response time, and unlocking policy for deployed military personnel.

Due to its unique unlocking responsibility, Verizon’s unlocked handsets have too often been effectively stolen and resold on the black market, commanding premium prices on the dark web, particularly in countries like Russia, China, and Cuba. The record demonstrates that the 60-day device locking period is insufficient for the company to effectively detect fraud before unlocking takes place. As a result, Verizon phones have been targeted. Time and again, federal and state law enforcement has investigated and prosecuted transnational handset trafficking schemes, finding they facilitate broader criminal enterprises like drug and human smuggling.

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