

From: Joey A. Ferguson, W4JF  
67 Greenbriar Ave  
Pawleys Island, SC 29585

Rule Making Number: RM-11828

Date: March 15, 2019

Subject: Comments regarding NPR RM-11828 as proposed by the American Radio Relay League

The American Radio Relay League (ARRL), of which I am a long-time member, unfortunately represents only around 19% of all FCC licensed radio amateurs in the United States. The ARRL is a membership-driven organization and has, over the years, been instrumental in many enhancements for radio amateurs - both members and non-members. The ARRL has cultivated a sound working relationship with the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) due to many years of collaboration and interaction on behalf of amateur radio in the United States and its territories.

Normally, I would fully support the ARRL on most initiatives, however they have this one dead wrong.

The ARRL has had a history of being complicit in the watering-down of the technical and public service aspects of amateur radio. I have had the privilege of holding an amateur license for 45 years. I started as a novice and worked my way through the very successful incentive licensing program to the amateur extra class. This PRM by the ARRL continues down the path of destroying the assurance that amateur radio licensees will have the required technical expertise to safely and soundly operate radio equipment with the understanding necessary to measure and prevent RF exposure, EMI and RF interference to other services, RF and spurious interference within the amateur band allocations, and the ability to safely operate to ensure their personal safety and the safety of others. The Technician Class license question pool is a witness to the inadequacy of this class of operator to be allocated additional privileges in the band segments proposed, segments that are already over-crowded. This inadequacy is further empowered by the "memorize, pass, and learn nothing" testing methodology in use today.

Public service is a cornerstone of the amateur radio service. The ARRL has clearly failed in recent years by making it much more difficult for radio amateurs to "qualify" and become active in public service. They have complicated the process so much that many have simply given-up. The ARRL turned a cold shoulder to its own National Traffic System, a messaging system manned by highly-skilled and technically competent operators. These amateurs are dedicated to passing emergency, priority, and routine traffic both on SSB and CW, a mode the ARRL considers "a barrier". I can say without hesitation that incentive licensing and a desire to serve the public is why the existing members of the National Traffic System get on the air every day and night to pass formal written traffic. That is why I am there, each evening, to hone skills and stay sharp in the event of a public need. This failure-oriented approach to public service by the ARRL, coupled with the watering-down of the technical and operational expertise that once existed in the amateur radio service, again rears its head in the ARRL PRM.

Statistics show that nearly 50% of all Technician class licensees drop-out of the Amateur Radio Service. The ARRL, based on comments in the PRM, attempts to leverage this drop-out rate by insisting that given more privileges, the dropout rate may be mitigated. But again, the ARRL discounts and ignores the value of incentive licensing, the reward of determination and self-learning, and the ultimate advancement to a license class deserving of the spectrum. ARRL is advocating a free hand-out to current and future Technician Class licensees. Handing-over hard-earned General Class operator spectrum to the entry-level Technician Class licensee eliminates any incentive to upgrade or to advance the personal technical skills and abilities of the Technician Class licensee. General Class spectrum should be reserved and allocated only to those that have studied and availed themselves by successfully passing the General Class license examination element.

The FCC is totally and absolutely on-target in their comments (page 17) stating...

"....A Technician Class licensee can upgrade to a General Class operator license and receive significantly more frequency privileges (including those at issue here) by answering correctly a minimum of twenty-six questions on a thirty-five-question written examination. TMRA has submitted *no evidence that we should depart from the Commission's long-standing policy of providing additional frequency privileges as an incentive to motivate amateur radio operators to advance their communication and technical skills....*" (underline and italics added for emphasis)

One must remember that the ARRL is membership-driven and largely membership capitalized. I hesitate to question the motives of the ARRL, however it is clear based on recent and not-so-recent history including reasoning offered in this PRM, that the ARRL is willing to do what is necessary to retain and increase membership by whatever means necessary. All the promises made by the ARRL in paragraph 28 of the PRM can and should be implemented and in no way requires new spectrum privileges for the Technician Class licensee. The ARRL should not hinge these initiatives on the FCC's acceptance of their request for more Technician spectrum. There is nothing preventing the ARRL from implementing these initiatives immediately. By listing these initiatives in paragraph 28, the ARRL vicariously admits failure on its part as the self-proclaimed "National Association for Amateur Radio", to reach-out and cater to those youth that may have the potential to become an FCC licensee in the Amateur Radio Service.

Assertations regarding results from surveys performed by the ARRL in support of their position included in the PRM (starting in Par.22), are scientifically and statistically inaccurate, irrelevant, and should be dismissed without prejudice due to bias and a grossly inadequate and under-represented sample size.

There is nothing in either the current license structure or the current spectrum allocations for the Technician Class license that prevents those licensees from becoming interested in various amateur radio modes and exploring the vast array of technology available in today's digital world. Allowing more spectrum in the phone portion of the HF bands does absolutely nothing to advance the digital aspects that are popularized today. A spectrum limited/power limited allocation for digital operations only may have some merit, however there is no real proof that even this allocation would serve the purpose for which the ARRL advocates.

If current Technician Licensees do not have the drive, determination, hunger, or personal desire to study and upgrade their licenses, they should simply remain a Technician or drop-out of the amateur radio service. There is no valid reason or argument for undeserved spectrum hand-outs to the Technician Class license holder. If Technician licensees do not have what it takes to learn and improve themselves,

then they do not belong in the amateur radio service at all. The FCC has long provided the Citizens Band service for those that do not have the expertise or desire to advance their knowledge in the art of radio and/or technical expertise in RF communications.

As a final observation, Christopher D. Imlay, the signatory on the ARRL's Petition for Rule Making, has since resigned and separated from the ARRL as General Counsel, and to my knowledge according to ARRL Board of Directors January 2019 board meeting minutes, no longer represents the ARRL in this or any other legal matters.

This concludes my comments regarding RM-11828.

Thank you for your time and consideration.