



June 26, 2019

Ex Parte Notice

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: *Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers, WC Docket No. 17-287; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service – Lifeline and Link-Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket No. 11-42; Telecommunications Carriers Eligible to Receive Universal Service Support, WC Docket No. 09-197*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On Monday, June 24, 2019, the undersigned on behalf of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”) spoke via telephone with Trent Harkrader, Deputy Chief of the Wireline Competition Bureau, regarding matters in the above-referenced proceedings.

Specifically, NTCA reported concerns raised in recent days by individual employees of member companies and cooperatives with respect to a new obligation imposed by the Universal Service Administrative Company (“USAC”) that would compel these individuals to provide personally identifiable information (“PII”) to be held by USAC as part of the Lifeline Representative Accountability Database (“RAD”). As relayed in recent USAC outreach, any individual tasked by his or her employer with performance of that provider’s Lifeline accountability verification efforts will be required now to supply USAC with his or her date of birth, last four digits of Social Security number, home address, and email address. Moreover, in the case of any errors or questions that need resolution, the individual may be required to supply documentation ranging from his or her birth certificate or social security card to a passport or even tax returns.

NTCA expressed support for efforts by the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) and USAC to address concerns about fraud or waste in the use of universal service resources, but explained that the concerns that had given rise to the need for such requirements in the first instance did not extend to employees of service providers. Instead, the issues giving rise to such concerns clearly surrounded “sales agent accountability” and a desire for such agents to provide “sufficient information so that USAC can verify the agent’s identity and determine the [eligible telecommunications carriers] he or she works for.” Letter from Ajit Pai, Chairman, Commission, to Vickie Robinson, Acting Chief Executive Officer and General Counsel, USAC (July 11, 2017), at 4. In short, the concerns to be addressed related first and foremost to independent sales agents and contractors rather than employees of service providers themselves.

Marlene H. Dortch

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To help address concerns about employees being required unnecessarily to provide PII – without any assurances, it should be noted, as to what measures USAC is taking to secure such information or indications as to its authority to require such information – NTCA recommended that, at a minimum, USAC should be directed to modify the individual registration process as soon as possible. In particular, NTCA suggests that, in the event that an employee of a service provider (as compared to a contractor or sales agent) must register for access to and use of the RAD, that individual should be required simply to provide full name, position with the provider, and other appropriate business-related information (such as business telephone number and email), and that the provider then include an officer's confirmation of the individual's status as an employee of the provider. Such an approach would help to ensure appropriate levels of accountability among all of those that may interact with the RAD, while recognizing that it is unnecessary to treat independent sales agents or contractors and employees precisely the same in doing so.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence. Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission's rules, a copy of this letter is being filed via ECFS.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael R. Romano

Michael R. Romano

Senior Vice President –

Industry Affairs & Business Development

cc: Trent Harkrader