

December 16, 2015

VIA ECFS

EX PARTE NOTICE

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Media Bureau Request for Comment on DSTAC Report, MB Dkt. No. 15-64

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On December 14, 2015, the Consumer Video Choice Coalition¹ (the “Coalition”) hosted Matthew Berry, Chief of Staff for Commissioner Ajit Pai, for a technical demonstration of the competitive navigation device solution described in the Downloadable Security Technical Advisory Committee’s Working Group 4 Report.² Coalition members in attendance included: Adam Goldberg of AGP LLC for Public Knowledge; Robert Schwartz of Constantine Cannon LLP for Hauppauge; Jeffrey Kardatzke, Milo Medin, Staci Pies, Austin Schlick, and Megan Anne Stull for Google Inc.; Brad Love for Hauppauge; Chip Pickering, Christopher Shipley, and the undersigned for INCOMPAS; and John Bergmayer and John Gasparini for Public Knowledge.

Consumers are demanding lower cost video options and the freedom to access new streaming over-the-top content. The demonstration by the Coalition proved that competition holds the technology solution for ending the era of forced set top box leasing from large incumbent MVPDs.

Using off-the-shelf equipment and open standards, the Coalition demonstrated how the competitive navigation device solution is technically capable of offering consumers linear

¹ The Coalition is comprised of Ceton Corp., Common Cause, Computer & Communications Industry Association, Consumer Action, Google Inc., Hauppauge, INCOMPAS, New America’s Open Technology Institute, Public Knowledge, Siliconust USA, Inc., VIZIO, and Writers Guild of America, West.

² See generally Final Report, Report of Working Group 4 to DSTAC at 180-194 (Aug. 28, 2015) (“WG4 Report”), available at <https://transition.fcc.gov/dstac/wg4-final-report.docx> (detailing the competitive navigation device solution proposal).

content from the MVPD to which they subscribe, along with their over-the-top content of choice, in a seamless manner with third-party navigation devices.³

This “live” demonstration used licensed video feeds from two different MVPDs. Different devices with distinct user interfaces and program guides displayed linear video feeds and metadata from the same MVPD, showing how the same virtual head-end is compatible with multiple devices. The demonstration also showed how a single device could display content from different MVPDs, illustrating how competitive devices could be portable between MVPDs.

The demonstration made clear that the competitive navigation device solution does not alter MVPD linear content or advertising. Furthermore, the competitive navigation device solution allows consumers to access fully the programming offerings to which they subscribe from their MVPD. Channel placement is unchanged. Emergency alerts function properly via the competitive navigation device solution so that public safety messages are received by viewers. Likewise, closed-captioning is timely and fully relayed, and customizable parental controls are made available.

The Coalition also explained that MVPDs would support third-party devices in numerous ways, and that such support would not require that customers install extra boxes or set-top equipment in their homes. Nor would the competitive navigation device proposal require that MVPDs change anything with respect to customers who continue to lease navigation devices directly from their MVPD. Additionally, the Coalition pointed out that many existing devices already would be compatible with the competitive navigation device proposal. After implementation, users could access MVPD content on existing IP-enabled devices, including tablets, allowing viewers to access MVPD content without any extra “box” at all.

Accordingly, the Coalition urged the Commission staff to move forward expeditiously with a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (“NPRM”) to fully consider adopting the competitive navigation device solution. With adoption of the competitive navigation device solution, consumers would have the option to purchase their own chosen navigation devices at retail at costs lower than the current typical annual rental price offered by MVPDs, which average more than \$200 per subscriber household. Moreover, consumers would have flexibility to choose user interfaces that best suit their needs, and consumers would be able to more easily access the over-the-top content of their choice without having to switch between program guides or devices. As a result, consumers would have a better viewing experience, and independent programmers that have been unable to gain access to MVPD platforms would have an opportunity to gain viewership by offering programming directly to consumers as an over-the-top product on equal footing with traditional cable programming.⁴

³ During the demonstration, the Coalition also played a video which may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0R8iJImPgg> that further shows that the technical capabilities demonstrated have been available for about eight years.

⁴ As long as large incumbent MVPDs control the development and distribution of navigation devices, they have the incentive and abilities to deter consumers from accessing independent

The Commission finally has within its grasp the ability to truly implement Section 629 of the Communications Act as intended, so that consumers have competitive options for navigation devices. The Commission should seize this moment and propose the competitive navigation device solution in an NPRM.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Karen Reidy

Karen Reidy
Vice President, Regulatory Affairs
INCOMPAS

cc: Matthew Berry

content that competes with MVPD service offerings over set-top boxes and televisions. However, with a robust, competitive marketplace for video navigation devices where consumers can easily purchase and install devices, manufacturers would be able to produce devices that can access over-the-top services, apps, and content alongside content received as part of an MVPD subscription. History shows that when consumers have options for consumer electronics that they can attach to the networks they use, innovation and investment flourishes, and consumers greatly benefit.