

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

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In the matter of
Defining Primary Lines

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CC Docket No. 97-181

Report and Order and
Further Notice of
Proposed Rulemaking

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Comments of
Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc. (SHHH)

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc. (SHHH) hereby submits comments in response to the FCC's Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on defining Primary lines.

SHHH thanks the FCC for recognizing that the Primary Line discussion might be an issue for people with hearing loss. We believe this demonstrates that the FCC, in line with its stated goals, is successfully integrating disability expertise and concerns throughout the FCC structure and we applaud the FCC for this welcome change.

SHHH is a national educational organization representing people who are hard of hearing of all ages and degrees of hearing loss. SHHH consists of a national office, eight state associations and a network of 250 chapters and groups in the United States. Many SHHH members use TTYs and telecommunications relay services and so the cost of second lines is an issue for them.

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SHHH understands that tariffs were changed to allow LECs to charge more for additional lines than for primary lines. The primary residential subscriber lines have been “capped” at lower levels than are applicable to other lines. Non-primary lines appear to be outside the protective umbrella of “universal access”. This would appear to be reasonable except when the secondary line is for the purpose of providing access to an individual with a disability.

SHHH strongly supports the FCC’s conclusion that people with hearing disabilities served by price cap LEC lines should have access to the telecommunications network at primary line rates. We also strongly support the proposal to provide similar treatment to individuals with hearing disabilities that are served by rate-of-return LEC lines.

The FCC offers two alternatives to ensure that consumers with hearing loss have access to the telephone network at primary-line rates. One would be to classify the TTY line as primary even if another line is treated as primary into the same residence. The other would be to subsidize the difference in charges that would apply when the TTY-dedicated line is deemed non-primary.

At this point SHHH’s reaction is to prefer the first alternative (dual “primary” line.) We would like to see the second primary line for TTYs at the “capped” primary line rate, and have it shielded from proliferating surcharges.

However, SHHH's preference is to go even further than the FCC's proposal and eliminate the cost of the access fees for subsequent lines needed for TTY/relay use completely, and we urge the FCC to consider that alternative seriously. For people with hearing loss the second line is not a luxury but rather the only way for them to have equivalent access to the phone system. Our request is also based on the fact that TTY users already have much higher telecommunications costs to purchase specialized equipment than do other telephone subscribers.

The NPRM states it would allow a second line at the same SLC rate as the primary where **there is a second person in the household** who needs a TTY. Voice and TTY households may have two lines, or two numbers with identi-ring. Both of these methods of accessing the phone system incur an extra cost and involve voice and TTYs users in the same household.

There are other situations where two lines are needed that we would like to bring to the FCC's attention: the use of two-line VCO and the use of the relay CA to read back answering machine messages and voicemail. In both cases two lines are essential for functional equivalency but **there are not two people**. One person is using both lines. And in the case of two-line VCO, three-way conference calling capability is necessary also. Two-line VCO users are paying a great deal more in order to have telephone communication that better approximates what hearing people have. Single line VCO is not functionally equivalent to regular voice phone as it is asynchronous, requiring turn taking and eliminates the non-verbal aspects of speech that convey a tremendous amount

of information. The other advantage of two-line VCO is that it allows a hard of hearing consumer to handle incoming voice calls transparently. This is an extremely important feature of two-line VCO that is often completely overlooked in discussion about two-line VCO. (If the consumer cannot understand the incoming call, the consumer can put the call on hold, call the relay service via three-way calling on the first line, direct the relay service to call the second text line, and then connect the two parties.) For hard of hearing people with residual hearing, two-line VCO allows them to understand people with accents or speech impairments, and other people they have trouble understanding. There is no technology for a single line today that provides this ability to simultaneously receive voice and data from any caller.

Reading information from answering machines and voicemail is an example where a second line becomes a necessity for functionally equivalent access, instead of just a convenience, for a person with hearing loss. Some state TRS will listen to the messages in a person's answering machine and/or voicemail, and transcribe the content back via TTY. There is no functionally equivalent way to accomplish this without a second line.

In these situations people with hearing loss need two lines and in the case of two-line VCO, three-way conference calling capability as well, just to access the phone system. SHHH believes they should not be penalized financially for trying to have functionally equivalent access to the phone system. We have reports from some of our members that they have complained to their carrier about having to pay the additional access fee for the second line being used with a TTY and that the carrier has waived the cost of the fee for

having a second residential line into the home. Then again some states, such as Wisconsin, through their Universal Service Fund, have administrative rules that waive the cost of 3-way conference calling for use with a second line for two-line VCO. We therefore request that a consistent system be set in place nationwide to allow for the needs for second lines and three-way conference calling by people with hearing loss to make it easier for them to have functionally equivalent access to the phone system.

Another issue that has been brought to our attention is that people who get a second line may lose their Universal Lifeline status, when in fact they need two lines to achieve basic access. The loss of Universal Lifeline has happened in California, we understand as a result of the state PUC's order rather than through a state or federal law requirement. SHHH seeks clarification of the status of Universal Lifeline in the situation where an individual with hearing loss needs two lines for functionally equivalent access.

Having supported the FCC's proposal for primary rates for TTY lines, SHHH is not sure that differentiating between primary and secondary residential lines is in the best interest of consumers with disabilities. Many consumers with disabilities are turning to the Internet as their preferred method of communicating with other people. Many also use a second line to receive faxes. Relatives of people with hearing or speech disabilities may also install a second line in order to receive faxes or Internet communication from them while using the first line for voice communication. It is our understanding that many Asian-Americans can communicate with their relatives who have hearing loss only via fax since their language cannot be conveyed via TTYs and 70% of speech-impaired

people use faxes due to the greater efficiency. We have been told that the true cost of adding a second line is much less than installing the first line. Therefore, imposing a higher fee for "non-primary lines" will have a detrimental effect on the nation and for people with disabilities that is not warranted by the real cost of adding a second line.

SHHH appreciates the opportunity to comment on primary/secondary line definitions as it does impact individuals with hearing loss and their access to the phone system.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Battat".

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