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November 22, 2002

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Government Affairs Bureau
Consumer Complaints
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Consumer Complaint against DirectTV

Dear Chairperson Powell:

Please accept the following complaint against DirectTV. I am writing about the immense difficulty I had in correctly getting my account cancelled. I had to speak with six people, including two supervisors, on four separate occasions before finally getting my account canceled. Additionally, I was billed for and received a collection notice for money that was never owed to DirectTV. I believe that many consumers would have been so frustrated by and intimidated by DirectTV's actions that they would have succumbed to DirectTV's demands and paid money simply not owed to DirectTV in order to avoid a protracted problem. My experience with DirectTV led me to conclude that they are probably knowingly taking advantage of many consumers. I would hope that the Federal Communications Commission would take steps to prevent further abuses. The facts of my complaint are as follows.

On June 17, 2002, I called up DirectTV Customer Service at 800-531-500 in order to cancel my daughter's service, Account #013781220. At that time, I spoke with "Ryan" who suggested that rather than cancel the account I suspend it. Consequently, I suspended the account. The next day I paid in full my June 10 DirectTV bill (copy enclosed), which covered the period of June 10 through July 10. Since the account had been suspended on June 17, DirectTV should have pro-rated my payment and returned the excess (\$41.66) to me.

Rather than receiving a refund, I received another bill (copy enclosed) in July. I again called DirectTV Customer Service on July 25 and explained to "Steven" that my account had been suspended the previous month, that I did not owe DirectTV any money, and that the current bill had been issued in error. Steven assured me that he would take care of the matter and that my account would be cleared. By that point it had slipped my mind that DirectTV actually owed me money (i.e. the \$41.66 that should have been returned from the June bill when I suspended the account).

Surprisingly, the next communication I received in reference to this matter was a Debt Collection notice (copy enclosed) dated September 4, 2002 from Nationwide Credit, Inc in the amount of \$42.44. Please note that rather than sending a second notice, DirectTV went straight to the intimidating and potentially harassing step of engaging a debt collector, even though they actually owed me money. With the potential problems and implicit threats that come from a debt collector, I contacted DirectTV Customer Service immediately to

again explain to them that I did not owe them any money. On September 9, 2002 I spoke with "Remisha" and her supervisor "Mr. Powers." They were both extremely unhelpful and refused to credit my account in the amount the Collection Agency was seeking. Mr. Powers told me that I would owe that money until I resumed DirectTV service and said I should contact the collection department.

At that point I was extremely frustrated and asked my son, Kuros Shakib, to assist me. After I described the problem to him he pointed out to me that not only did I not owe DirectTV any money but also DirectTV actually owed me \$41.66. He then spoke with "Barbara" at Customer Service and she agreed to remove the amount (\$42.44) that the collection agency was seeking from my account. When he pointed out that the account should reflect that it was cancelled on June 17 and should be credited \$41.66, "Barbara" was unwilling to give the appropriate credit. Although she was well meaning and pleasant during the conversation, she seemed to be unable to understand why \$41.66 was the appropriate amount to credit back to the account. Finally, Kuros asked to speak to her supervisor and was transferred to "Tom." Again there was quite a bit of difficulty in getting "Tom" to give the correct credit. "Tom" argued that DirectTV was already helping us by reducing the account by the amount the collection department was seeking (\$42.44). Kuros pointed out to "Tom" that it was ridiculous for him to suggest that DirectTV was doing us any favor by not pursuing money that they had improperly billed. DirectTV simply had no right to that amount of money. Eventually, after much wrangling and repeated explanations, the supervisor finally was able to understand that DirectTV had made two errors- one, in not suspending and crediting our account in June and, two, in billing us improperly in July. DirectTV then agreed to send me a check for the proper credit amount.

The first thought I had after this harrowing problem was resolved was that I would switch to the Dish Network for satellite service. I then remembered that Echostar and DirectTV are planning to merge. I hope that you will consider my complaint in deciding not to approve this merger as it will severely limit the choices of consumers who have had negative experiences with and no longer want to do business with one satellite provider. I would ask that you include my complaint as a public comment on the Echostar/DirectTV merger, Docket #01-348.

Canceling an account should not be this difficult. It should not necessitate four separate calls to Customer Service. Furthermore, it is shocking that the people at DirectTV are so unable to properly correct such a situation when it is brought to their attention. I have only been able to conclude that DirectTV's customer service has the systematic effect of frustrating the efforts of consumers to get legitimate problems resolved. Indeed, I would not be surprised to learn that other customers have been frustrated and harassed into paying DirectTV money that was not legitimately owed to DirectTV. I am enclosing copies of two complaints posted on the complaints.com website which tell of similar problems. I would request that the FTC require DirectTV to evaluate their entire system for canceling accounts and handling consumer complaints. They should also be required to review all of their recent cancellations to make sure they were all cancelled correctly, appropriate credits were issued, and improper additional bills were not sent out. They should also be required to go over all their accounts that they have sent to collection agencies and make sure that they are legitimately owed the money they seek. Along these lines, DirectTV should be asked to implement a system of at least one over due notice before sending the matter for collection.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,

Frances W. Shakib

Encl.

cc: DirectTV, Inc.
Nationwide Credit, Inc.