



July 25,

2008

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: The Matter of Verizon Wireless/Alltel Corporation, Transfer of Control Applications (WB Docket 08-95)

Dear Commissioners:

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)¹ is pleased at the opportunity to provide a comment in regard to the transfer of control applications for these companies. AAPD advocates for accessibility and usability of all telecommunications devices and services so that persons with disabilities are not left out, left behind or otherwise excluded by technological barriers in products and services commonly used in everyday life.²

AAPD believes that this merger could benefit many wireless consumers around the nation, including many of whom are people with disabilities. Furthermore, approval of this merger could help increase investment in technology with the potential to better enable people with disabilities to find work and become more active members of their communities. We support this merger if a new and deeper commitment to accessibility and usability is made and with a guarantee, that as

¹AAPD is the largest national independent nonprofit cross-disability member organization in the United States, dedicated to ensuring economic self-sufficiency and political empowerment for the more than 50 million Americans with disabilities. AAPD works in coalition with other disability organizations for the full implementation and enforcement of disability nondiscrimination laws, particularly the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other statutory mandates for persons with disabilities.

² Specifically, the Board of Directors of AAPD passed June 14, 2006, a policy resolution as follows: Given that telecommunications and technology are fields that are rapidly changing, and this will impact the integration of persons with disabilities in all aspects of daily living, be it resolved that: with regard to telecommunications equipment and services, accessibility and usability are critical, and affordability is essential, for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities; and with regard to technology, barriers to usability and availability should be removed; all technologies should incorporate the concepts of accessibility and usability in design, development, production and dissemination, with the intention of making new technologies available to all persons regardless of disability.

new services and technologies created by the transfer evolve, that the new products and services will effectively address the diverse accessibility and usability needs of persons with disabilities.

The Verizon-Alltel merger could lead to more high-quality wireless networks available to many consumers who currently lack this option. It will likely provide new service in rural areas, and current Alltel customers will gain access to Verizon's network. This availability is important for people with disabilities, many of whom rely on wireless devices not only to communicate with friends and families but also in emergency situations. Wireless capability helps ensure that people with disabilities have the services necessary to maintain lives of independence. For example, being able to contact friends or first responders from any location at any time is important for all consumers, but may be especially important for persons with physical disabilities who may use accessible transportation, and when stranded by breakdowns or unexpected scheduling changes may need immediate response.

The merger may also mean more money for investment in new technology. The explosion of new communications technology over the past decade has added many new products and services, all of which can benefit people with disabilities. For instance, far too many people with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed; the availability of more and better modes of communication can impact this and provide ways and means for people with disabilities to find employment, engage in employment-related activities, and secure and maintain employment.

However, it has been our observation that, typically, when companies merge, there may be staff turnover and turmoil within the merging entities. Customer support and technical support services in call centers and service centers may be adversely affected during the integration. As the transition takes place, customers of the merging entities often find it difficult to resolve service issues and complaints. AAPD is concerned specifically about the effect that this transfer of control will have on current and potential customers with disabilities who need assistance in resolving their billing, technical or service concerns that may be disability-related.

As examples, the efficacy of securing alternate format billing or usability solutions that specifically address customers with disabilities may be disrupted. For instance, the work-around solution of "free 411" for persons with vision disabilities who have accepted this resolution for the lack of audio outputs for "last number dialed", "incoming call number" and "contacts list" on their cell phone devices: one company may have a different policy than the other. AAPD urges the FCC to require the more generous resolution of "unlimited free 411" rather than a "lowest common denominator" approach to this work-around resolution.

While we recognize that Verizon Wireless has taken many steps to ensure accessibility and usability of its products and services, we recommend that the FCC require, as a condition of this transfer of control of the Alltel licenses, an additional and special commitment to standards for customer service and support for people with disabilities both during the transition period and following the merger, if it is allowed.

To prevent disruption in handling of requests by consumers with disabilities, AAPD urges the FCC to include in any order about this transfer of control, a requirement for a re-commitment to the Communications Act's disability accessibility requirements, such as Sections 225 (relay services), 255 (accessible products and services) and any other pertinent sections, both during the transition period and when control is completed.

AAPD appreciates this opportunity to comment in this matter. Historically, these companies have made efforts to ensure some accessible and usable services to persons with disabilities. We ask the Commission to require continuation of this effort and a new and deeper commitment to guarantee, that as new services and technologies created by the transfer evolve, that the new products and services will effectively address the diverse accessibility and usability needs of persons with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

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