

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Telecommunications Carriers Eligible to Receive Universal Service Support)	WC Docket No. 09-197
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Petition of Georgia RSA #8 Partnership for Waiver of Various Sections of The Commission’s Universal Service Fund Filing Deadlines)	WC Docket No. 08-71
)	
To: Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau		

WAIVER – EXPEDITED ACTION REQUESTED

**GEORGIA RSA #8 PARTNERSHIP
PETITION FOR WAIVER**

Georgia RSA #8 Partnership (“Georgia RSA #8” or the “Partnership”),¹ consisting of Allied Wireless Communications Corporation (“Allied Wireless”),² Bulloch Cellular, Inc.³

¹ Georgia RSA #8 is a commercial mobile radio services (“CMRS”) carrier licensed by the Commission to provide wireless communication services throughout portions of Georgia. Georgia RSA #8 holds the B-block cellular license for the Georgia 8-Warren Rural Service Area (CMA 378), as well as numerous microwave licenses associated with the operation of its cellular system. Georgia RSA #8 will provide service in accordance with the terms of its FCC licenses and has a history of bringing competitive universal service to Georgia customers and improving the ability of consumers, law enforcement agencies, and other telecommunications users to communicate during emergencies in Georgia.

² Allied Wireless is wholly-owned by Atlantic Tele-Network, Inc. (“ATNI”), a publicly-traded corporation headquartered in Beverly, Massachusetts. In June 2009, ATNI filed a series of applications with the FCC, jointly with Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless and certain of its subsidiaries (“Verizon Wireless”) (collectively, “the FCC Applicants”), pursuant to Sections 214 and 310(d) of the Act. In these applications, the FCC Applicants sought FCC approval for the assignment or transfer of control of certain wireless licenses and related authorizations from subsidiaries of Verizon Wireless to a holding company to be indirectly owned by ATNI. *See Atlantic Tele-Network, Inc. and Verizon Wireless Seek FCC Consent to Assign or Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations*, WT Docket No. 09-119, Public Notice, DA 09-1515 (rel. July 9, 2009). On April 7, 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice announced its approval of ATNI’s acquisition of the former Alltel wireless assets in six states, including those in Georgia which included Alltel’s ownership interest in the Georgia RSA #8 Partnership. On April 20, 2010, the FCC granted its approval of the transaction. *See Atlantic Tele-Network, Inc. and Verizon Wireless*

(“Bulloch Cellular”), Pineland Telephone Company (“Pineland Telephone”), Plant R.S.A. 8 Cellular, Inc. (“Plant R.S.A. 8 Cellular”)⁴ and Planters Rural Cellular, Inc. (“Planters Rural Cellular”),⁵ pursuant to Sections 1.3 and 1.925 of the Commission’s Rules, respectfully requests that the Commission grant a waiver of Sections 54.313, 54.314 and 54.307(d) (collectively, the “Applicable Rules”) of the Commission’s Rules stemming from the Partnership’s recent Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”) designation by the Georgia Public Service Commission (“GPSC”).⁶ Grant of the requested waiver would make the Partnership eligible for universal service high-cost support as of April 26, 2010, the effective date of the GPSC’s ETC designation of the Partnership. Grant of this Petition is in the public interest because it will, restore high-cost

Seek FCC Consent to Assign or Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations, WT Docket No. 09-119, Memorandum Opinion and Order, DA 10-661 (rel. Apr. 20, 2010) (“*ATNI – Verizon Wireless Order*”). Ultimately, these licenses and related authorizations were acquired by Allied Wireless upon consummation of the transaction on April 26, 2010. The transaction has resulted in ATNI’s acquiring control of wireless properties, including wireless spectrum licenses and network assets, serving over 800,000 subscribers across Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina, and South Carolina.² The transaction also aided Verizon Wireless in fulfilling its divestiture obligations under the FCC’s order approving the merger of Verizon Wireless and Alltel Corporation. *See Applications of Celco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless and Atlantis Holdings LLC*, WT Docket No. 08-95, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 23 FCC Rcd 17444 (2008); *see also* Final Judgment, United States of America et al. v. Verizon Communications Inc., and Alltel Corporation, No. 1:08-cv-01878 (D.D.C. Oct. 30, 2008) (“*Verizon-Alltel Final Judgment*”). Allied Wireless acquired the wireless assets formerly operated by Alltel in 26 of the total of 105 cellular market areas required to be divested.

³ Bulloch County Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., (“Bulloch Telephone Cooperative”) a local exchange carrier located in Statesboro, Georgia, was formed in 1951 to meet the needs of telephone service to the people of Bulloch County. Bulloch Telephone Cooperative provides the most modern telecommunication services to its members and the latest in advanced technology including Internet access, voice mail, custom calling, paging and cellular service. Its mission is to provide its members with high quality telecommunications services at affordable rates. Bulloch Cellular is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bulloch Telephone Cooperative and is incorporated under the laws of the State of Georgia.

⁴ Pineland Telephone Cooperative, Inc. (“Pineland Telephone”) is a Georgia ILEC in Southeast Georgia that has been in business for 59 years. It serves approximately 11,000 subscribers and provides POTS, DSL, Long Distance, Video and FTTH to its customers. Pineland Telephone has several wholly-owned subsidiaries, including Pineland Cellular, Inc. and Plant Cellular RSA 8, Inc. Both entities were incorporated in the State of Georgia in 1989.

⁵ Planters Rural Cellular, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Planters Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc. and was incorporated in the State of Georgia in 1988. Planters Telephone Cooperative, Inc. has its headquarters in Newington, Georgia. Planters Telephone has joined with other telephone companies in the area to bring cellular telephone service under the Alltel name to Screven County and Effingham County, as well as surrounding areas.

⁶ *See Application of Georgia RSA #8 Partnership for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in the State of Georgia*, Order Granting ETC Status, Docket No. 32325 (designation effective as of Apr. 26, 2010 by Sept. 21, 2010 PSC vote) (Exhibit 1).

support to the Partnership, thereby benefitting all Georgia residents within the Partnership's ETC designated service area, and fulfilling the goals of the *Verizon Wireless–Alltel Order* by helping to establish a strong and effective competitor in the wireless marketplace.⁷

I. BACKGROUND

Until April 26, 2010, the Partnership had received ETC funding through the ETC designation held by Alltel Communications, Inc. (“Alltel”). Alltel held the largest ownership share in the Partnership and had been designated an ETC by the GPSC in 2007.⁸ However, upon Alltel's departure from the Partnership and Allied Wireless' entrance, Georgia RSA #8 needed a new ETC designation in order to continue receiving high-cost support. As a result, Georgia RSA #8 filed its own application for ETC designation *nunc pro tunc* with the GPSC.⁹

On September 21, 2010, the GPSC voted to grant the Partnership's application for ETC designation *nunc pro tunc* – effective April 26, 2010 – so that any USF support, which had been interrupted (due to the transfer of control of Alltel's ownership interest in the Partnership and that the Partnership would have otherwise been entitled to under the ETC designation provided to Alltel), was not lost as a result of Alltel's departure from the Partnership. No parties filed petitions for reconsideration of the GPSC Order granting Georgia RSA #8 its ETC designation.

⁷ *Applications of Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless and Atlantis Holdings LLC for Consent to Transfer Control of Licenses, Authorizations, and Spectrum Manager and de Facto Transfer of Leasing Arrangements*, WT Docket No. 08-95, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Declaratory Ruling, 23 FCC Rcd 17444 (2008) (“*Verizon Wireless-Alltel Order*”).

⁸ See Application of Alltel Communications, Inc. for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunication Carrier in the State of Georgia, Docket No. 10396-U, Order Granting ETC Status (Oct. 15, 2007).

⁹ Because the Verizon Wireless divestitures were required to be structured as asset sales, rather than corporate mergers, ATNI was not assigned the ETC designations for these areas. See *Verizon Wireless-Alltel Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 17518, 17519 (¶¶ 163, 167) (explaining that the divestiture must be accomplished through the sale of divestiture assets to third party purchasers, or through transfer to a divestiture trustee “who shall be solely responsible for accomplishing disposal” of the assets).

II. FCC RULES FOR WHICH WAIVER IS REQUESTED

Section 54.313(d)(vi) and Section 54.314(d)(6) require that in the case of “newly designated carriers,” the state public service commission involved must file a certification with the FCC and the Universal Service Administrative Corporation (“USAC”) within 60 days of the effective date of the carrier’s ETC designation stating that “all federal high-cost support provided to [the carrier] will be used only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which the support is intended.”¹⁰ Section 54.307(d) requires “newly designated carriers” to file with USAC line count data within 60 days of the effective date of the carrier’s designation as an ETC in order to be eligible to receive high-cost support.¹¹

III. REQUEST FOR WAIVER

It was simply not possible for Georgia RSA #8 (or the GPSC) to comply with the literal terms of Sections 54.313(d)(vi) and 54.314(d)(6) of the Commission’s Rules. The Georgia PSC granted ETC designation to Georgia RSA #8 on September 21, 2010, retroactive to April 26, 2010. Thus, it would have been impossible for the Georgia PSC to file the required certifications within 60 days of April 26, 2010. Similarly, Georgia RSA #8 could not have submitted line count data by the 60-day deadline of June 25, 2010, in accordance with Section 54.307(d) of the Commission’s Rules, because there was no way of knowing, until September 21, 2010 (the date the Georgia PSC granted the Partnership’s request for ETC designation) that the 60-day clock would begin running as of April 26, 2010.

¹⁰ 47 C.F.R. § 54.313(d)(vi); 47 C.F.R. § 54.314(e)(6).

¹¹ Georgia RSA #8 filed its annual Interstate Access Support (“IAS”) and Interstate Common Line Support (“ICLS”) certifications for 2009 and 2010 by the annual June 30th deadline. See <http://www.usac.org/hc/tools/checklist/>. Section 54.809 and Section 54.904 require, respectively, that in order to receive IAS and ICLS, an ETC must file a certification stating that all IAS and ICLS received by it will be used only for the provision, maintenance, and upgrading of facilities and services for which support is intended. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.809(a) and (c); 47 C.F.R. § 54.904(a) and (d). As a result, Georgia RSA #8 is not seeking waivers of Sections 54.809(a) and 54.904(a) and (d) of the Commission’s rules.

Section 1.3 of the Commission's Rules provides the Commission with discretion to waive the application of any of its rules upon a showing of good cause. In addition, Section 1.925(b)(3) provides that the Commission may grant a waiver where it is shown that:

- (i) The underlying purpose of the rule(s) would not be served or would be frustrated by application to the instant case, and that a grant of the requested waiver would be in the public interest; or
- (ii) In view of unique or unusual factual circumstances of the instant case, application of the rule(s) would be inequitable, unduly burdensome or contrary to the public interest, or the applicant has no reasonable alternative.¹²

Federal courts have also recognized that "a waiver is appropriate only if special circumstances warrant a deviation from the general rule and such a deviation would serve the public interest."¹³

Accordingly, the Commission may "exercise its discretion to waive a rule where particular facts would make strict compliance inconsistent with the public interest."¹⁴

IV. DISCUSSION

There are compelling reasons for the FCC to grant expeditiously the requested waiver. This case presents unique and unusual circumstances that would make the literal application of the Applicable Rules inequitable and contrary to the public interest. Further, the underlying purpose of the Applicable Rules would not be served by their literal application in this case.

The circumstances of the ATNI-Verizon Wireless transaction clearly are unique and unusual. The Alltel divestitures were *required* by the Consent Decree to be structured as asset sales rather than corporate mergers. As a result of the transaction, Georgia RSA #8 required a new ETC designation and promptly reapplied for ETC status in Georgia. Thus, the requirement imposed by the Consent Decree created a gap between the time when ATNI acquired the

¹² 47 C.F.R. § 1.925(b)(3).

¹³ *Northwest Cellular Telephone Co. v. FCC*, 897 F.2d 1164, 1166 (D.C. Cir. 1990); see *WAIT Radio v. FCC*, 418 F.2d 1153, 1157 (D.C. Cir. 1969), *cert. denied*, 409 U.S. 1027 (1972).

¹⁴ *Northwest Cellular Telephone Co.*, 897 F.2d at 1166 (citing *WAIT Radio*, 418 F.2d at 1159).

Verizon Wireless assets, including its 33.33% ownership interest in Georgia RSA #8, and the time when Georgia RSA #8 was able to secure favorable action from the GPSC on its request for ETC designation. Georgia RSA #8 attempted to minimize this gap by its prompt request for the designation, but it had no control over the timing of the GPSC's action on its request.

Application of the literal terms of the Applicable Rules would also be highly inequitable, and entirely contrary to the public interest, because of the unique circumstances of this case. The very purpose of the Verizon Wireless–Alltel divestitures was “to eliminate the anticompetitive effects of the Verizon-Alltel merger in certain markets.”¹⁵ Particularly to address this concern, the Consent Decree required that the buyer of the divested assets should have the “capability (including the ... *financial* capability) of competing effectively in the provision of mobile wireless telecommunications services.”¹⁶ In its *ATNI-Verizon Wireless Order*, the Commission recognized that it was “authoriz[ing] a new operator in the U.S.” in order “to promote mobile wireless competition”¹⁷

Unless the Petition is granted, the Partnership, which includes Allied Wireless – the new entrant that the FCC and DOJ sought to foster – would be forced to compete without approximately five months of critical universal service support funds that are material to its infrastructure build-out to better serve customers in high-cost areas. Meanwhile, Georgia's much larger competitors, including Verizon Wireless,¹⁸ have continued to receive funding during this period. In fact, if the waiver is not granted, the perverse result would be that Verizon Wireless – the company required to divest assets in order to prevent anti-competitive consequences – will

¹⁵ *ATNI-Verizon Wireless Order*, 25 FCC Rcd at 3772 (¶ 18).

¹⁶ *Verizon-Alltel Final Judgment* at 11-12 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ *ATNI-Verizon Wireless Order*, 25 FCC Rcd at 3764 (¶ 1).

¹⁸ Verizon Wireless acquired ETC status in Georgia when it acquired Alltel, the ETC-designated entity. *See also Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Sprint Corporation*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 22663 (WCB 2004).

have been eligible to receive high-cost support for approximately a five-month period for the same area where Georgia RSA #8 would be denied such support. This result would be patently contrary to the goals that led the Commission and DOJ to order the divestitures on terms that permit a new competitor to step into Alltel's shoes and compete effectively.

Expeditious grant is also in the public interest because delay imperils service to customers in these rural portions of Georgia – customers that historically have benefited from universal service funding disbursed to service providers. Moreover, grant of this waiver will impose no additional burden on the universal service fund. Georgia RSA #8, through Alltel, was already a designated ETC for the very same service area in Georgia and is simply recapturing the benefits provided by being an ETC. In addition, under the interim cap on high-cost disbursements to competitive ETCs adopted by the FCC in 2008,¹⁹ the ETC designation of Georgia RSA #8 in Georgia will have absolutely no impact on the level of distributions from the federal universal service fund.

V. FCC PRECEDENT

The FCC has addressed requests for the waiver of filing deadlines for newly designated carriers only a few times since 2005, when the FCC amended Sections 54.313 and 54.307 to add a provision specifically applicable to newly designated carriers.²⁰

In 2005, the Commission approved retroactive eligibility for universal support in *Qwest – Nebraska*, which presents a set of facts similar to those presented in this case.²¹ As a result of

¹⁹ *High-Cost Universal Service, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, *Order*, 23 FCC Rcd 8834 (2008), *aff'd*, *Rural Cellular Ass'n v. FCC*, 588 F.3d 1095 (D.C. Cir. 2009).

²⁰ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Report and Order, CC Docket No. 96-45, 20 FCC Rcd 6371 (2005).

²¹ *Qwest Corporation (Nebraska) Petition for Waiver of Section 54.313 of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, *Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 19200 (WCB 2005) (*Qwest – Nebraska*).

new cost benchmarks set forth in a December 24, 2003 Commission Public Notice, non-rural carriers in two additional states, Nebraska and South Dakota, were eligible to receive non-rural high-cost support beginning in 2004. Qwest argued that non-rural carriers in Nebraska became eligible, for the first time, to receive high-cost support after the October 1, 2003 certification filing deadline had passed. The Nebraska Public Service Commission did not, however, submit the required certification with the Commission until March 16, 2004.²² Nonetheless, the Commission found that:

good cause exists to waive the certification filing deadlines in Section 54.313 in order to allow the Petitioners to receive high-cost universal service support for the first and second quarters of 2004. The Petitioners have demonstrated that special circumstances warrant a deviation from the filing deadlines in Section 54.313. ... Because the Petitioners and their respective state commissions were not aware of their eligibility for non-rural high-cost support prior to October 1, 2003, however, they could not have met, under any circumstances, the October 1, 2003 certification filing deadline. ... In these instances, these special circumstances outweigh any processing difficulties that USAC may face as a result of the late-filed certification.²³

Significantly, the FCC granted retroactive eligibility from the March 16, 2004 date on which the Nebraska PSC filed its certification to January 1, 2004, and the FCC found that such special circumstances outweighed any processing difficulties that USAC might face.²⁴ Georgia RSA #8, not unlike Qwest-Nebraska, could not have filed any earlier because of special circumstances completely and totally outside of its control.

²² The South Dakota PSC did not submit its certification until March 25, 2004. *Id.* at 19202.

²³ *Qwest-Nebraska*, 20 FCC Rcd at 19203-04 (¶ 9). The FCC directed USAC to distribute retroactive support on a phased-in basis. *Id.* at ¶ 9, n. 34.

²⁴ It should be noted that even if the “newly designated carrier” provisions of Sections 54.313(d)(vi) and 54.307(d) had been in effect, the Nebraska PSC certification filing still would have been outside the 60-day period.

In 2009, the FCC denied the request of Centennial USVI Operations Corp. (“Centennial”) for waiver of Sections 54.307(d) and 54.314(d) of the Rules.²⁵ However, the situation here is very different than the situation in the *Centennial Order*. Unlike Centennial, Georgia RSA #8 is seeking the continuation of high-cost support for the *same* customers and the *same* system that was already receiving high-cost support. But for the requirement of the Consent Decree that the Verizon divestitures must to be structured as asset sales rather than corporate mergers, AWCC (and subsequently Georgia RSA #8) would simply have stepped into the shoes of Alltel and continued receiving high-cost support. By contrast, Centennial was a first-time applicant for high-cost support in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In addition, in the Centennial case, the Commission appeared to take issue with the fact that the United States Virgin Islands (“USVI”) PSC was attempting to retroactively designate Centennial as an ETC in the USVI as of December 2, 2006, despite the fact that the USVI legislature did not authorize the USVI PSC to designate CMRS providers as ETCs until December 2007 and Centennial did not actually apply to the USVI PSC for ETC designation until February 2008. In contrast, the GPSC clearly has jurisdiction over competitive ETC applications and has exercised that authority over CETCs for several years dating back to the ETC designation provided by the GPSC to Alltel in 2007. Moreover, the period of time for which Georgia RSA #8 is seeking retroactive high-cost support is limited to approximately five months.

Recently, the Commission was asked by ATNI, in connection with its purchase of divested Verizon Wireless assets in North Carolina, to approve a retroactive effective date for

²⁵ *Centennial USVI Operations Corp. Petition for Waiver of Universal Service High-Cost Filing Deadlines*, WC Docket No. 08-71 and CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 24 FCC Rcd 4821 (WCB Apr. 21, 2009) (“*Centennial Order*”).

ETC designation.²⁶ The facts presented by ATNI were the same as those presented in this request. ATNI ultimately withdrew its waiver request in order to expedite FCC consideration of ATNI's underlying application for ETC designation. However, in its Order, the Commission stated that:

We therefore do not rule on this aspect of AWCC's petition.... Given that we do not address the merits of ATN[I]'s request for a retroactive designation, our decision here should have no bearing on pending state proceedings regarding the appropriate effective date of any ETC designation.²⁷

Georgia RSA #8, with the assistance of the GPSC and its staff, has attempted to rectify the situation as quickly as possible.²⁸ Georgia RSA #8 filed a comprehensive ETC application, including a comprehensive five-year service improvement plan, with the GPSC shortly after the ATNI-Verizon Wireless transaction was consummated. In addition, the GPSC reviewed and voted to approve the Partnership's ETC designation in approximately three months – a Herculean effort. Georgia RSA #8 is now filing this waiver within a few days of determining that no petition for reconsideration was filed on the GPSC's Order designating Georgia RSA #8 an ETC.

In short, Georgia RSA #8, in coordination with the GPSC, has moved as quickly as possible in attempting to resolve this matter and has done so with the interests of the rural Georgia residents it has served for nearly two decades serves in mind – customers who stand to benefit significantly by the Commission's expedited grant of this Petition.

²⁶ *Petition for Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Designations in the State of North Carolina*, WC Docket No. 09-197 and CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, DA 10-1652, 2010 WL 3415615 (WCB Aug. 30, 2010) (“*AWCC North Carolina Designation Order*”).

²⁷ *AWCC North Carolina Designation Order* at ¶ 8, n. 24.

²⁸ In contrast, in the Centennial case, the USVI PSC's rural high-cost certification was filed more than a year after the 60-day deadline date.

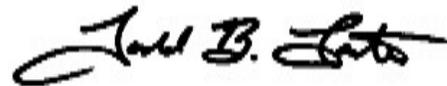
VI. CONCLUSION

Expedited grant of the Partnership's Petition is in the public interest, because it will restore support to the Partnership (to the direct benefit of the rural customers served by Georgia RSA #8) and it will fulfill the goals of the *Verizon Wireless-Alltel Order* to establish strong and effective competition in the wireless marketplace.

Georgia RSA #8 respectfully requests that the Bureau grant its Petition expeditiously so that Georgia RSA #8 is eligible to receive high-cost support as of April 26, 2010 – the Closing Date of the ATNI-Verizon Wireless transaction.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGIA RSA #8 PARTNERSHIP



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