

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

<i>In the Matter of</i>)	
)	
Connect America Fund)	WC Docket No. 10-90
)	
A National Broadband Plan for Our Future)	GN Docket No. 09-51
)	
Establishing Just and Reasonable Rates for Local Exchange Carriers)	WC Docket No. 07-135
)	
High-Cost Universal Service Support)	WC Docket No. 05-337
)	
Developing an Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime)	CC Docket No. 01-92
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Lifeline and Link-Up)	WC Docket No. 03-109
)	
Universal Service Reform – Mobility Fund)	WT Docket No. 10-208

REPLY COMMENTS OF GENERAL COMMUNICATION, INC.

INTRODUCTION

General Communication, Inc. (“GCI”) hereby replies to comments on its request for a limited waiver of the new call signaling rules (the “Rules”) adopted by the Commission as part of the Commission’s October 27, 2011 *Report and Order* (the “CAF Order”).¹ As GCI explained in its Petition, it is not possible for GCI to comply with the letter of the Rules, given the lack of SS7 deployment by rural Alaska ILECs, the use of an MF-based Demand Assigned

¹ *Connect America Fund*, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at Appendix A, 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601(a)(1) & (2), WC Docket Nos. 10-90 *et al.* (rel. Nov. 18, 2011).

Multiple Access (“DAMA”) satellite system, and other unique features of the Alaska market, all of which present unusual call signaling challenges that can prevent simple compliance.

Comments in response to GCI’s Petition confirm the need for GCI’s requested waiver. The Commission should reject, however, the Rural Associations’ requested waiver conditions, which are impossible to satisfy in some instances and would impose unnecessary burdens and costs (e.g., requiring RLECs to implement SS7 signaling at great expense) with little benefit or justification. Indeed, the record in the USF/ICC reform proceeding does not suggest that Alaska carriers have encountered the significant call signaling or phantom traffic problems that motivated the recent reforms. The proposed conditions will only divert scarce resources from the far more critical task of delivering service to rural Alaskans. Finally, the Commission should grant GCI’s request for a waiver to permit it to continue to evaluate its compliance with the new Rules, develop remediation plans, and seek further additional waivers as appropriate.

I. The Commission Should Grant GCI’s Waiver and Reject the Rural Associations’ Requested Conditions.

Only two commenters filed in this proceeding: CenturyLink, which supports GCI’s requested waiver, and a group of associations (the “Rural Associations”) representing rural rate-of-return regulated incumbent local exchange carriers, which supports GCI’s request in most circumstances.²

The Rural Associations (unaccompanied by any of their members that actually provide service in Alaska) propose a series of burdensome and unnecessary conditions that appear to be

² Comments of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies, Western Telecommunications Alliance, and National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc. on GCI’s Petition for Limited Waiver of the Commission’s Call Signaling Rules at 2, WC Docket No. 10-90, *et al.* (filed Apr. 2, 2012) (“Rural Association Comments”).

part of a template response for all signaling waivers, irrespective of the underlying waiver request.³ Specifically, the Rural Associations request that GCI be required to (1) publish a list of all legacy switch locations that would fall under the waiver; (2) provide terminating carriers with monthly information necessary to audit PIU or call records; and (3) submit reports at six month intervals detailing the status of GCI's efforts to upgrade its network to come into compliance with call signaling rules.⁴ The Commission should reject this request.

First and foremost, the proposed conditions fail to recognize that full compliance with the Rules requires compliant technology at both ends of the call signaling relationship. For example, GCI has in many cases relied on MF signaling because of the capabilities of the RLEC with which it is communicating. If GCI were required to report on the status of efforts to upgrade the network to come into compliance with call signaling rules it would, in effect, be required to report on RLEC efforts to upgrade their networks. This would be a pointless exercise, as the relevant RLECs, not GCI, are the only parties in a position to provide the Commission with full

³ Comments of the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.; National Telecommunications Cooperative Association; Organization for the Promotion of Small Telecommunications Companies; and the Western Telecommunications Alliance, WC Docket No. 10-90, *et al.* (filed Feb. 9, 2012); Comments of the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc., National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies, and the Western Telecommunications Alliance on CenturyLink's Petition for Limited Waiver of the Commission's Call Signaling Rules, WC Docket No. 10-90, *et al.* (filed Feb. 29, 2012); Comments of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies, Western Telecommunications Alliance, and National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc. on Verizon's Petition for Limited Waiver of the Commission's Call Signaling Rules, WC Docket No. 10-90, *et al.* (filed Mar. 19, 2012); Comments of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies, Western Telecommunications Alliance, and National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc. on Hawaiian Telcom's Petition for Limited Waiver of the Commission's Call Signaling Rules, WC Docket No. 10-90, *et al.* (filed Apr. 9, 2012).

⁴ Rural Association Comments at 6-7.

information about planned changes to their networks. Indeed, GCI doubts that the relevant RLECs would have any interest in sharing these often sensitive plans with GCI.

Moreover, the proposed conditions would require providers like GCI to upgrade their networks to come into compliance with the call signaling rules regardless of the cost or benefit of those upgrades. As explained above, GCI cannot comply alone—deploying an SS7 switch where the RLEC uses MF signaling, for example, will not enable the RLEC to receive SS7 signaling. It would merely impose an unnecessary cost at a time when declining USF support is already causing severe challenges to providers serving rural Alaska.

Similarly, in remote Alaska, GCI relies on DAMA, a satellite channel access protocol, to “switch” GCI traffic in the sky, eliminating expensive double-hopping (*e.g.*, satellite link from calling party to switch *and* satellite link from switch to called party) that caused highly degraded voice calling due to latency but was necessary to complete most intervillage calls in remote Alaska. GCI’s DAMA system relies on MF signaling. This nonstandard arrangement has significant benefits for rural Alaska, as it has driven down the cost and improved the quality of intervillage calling. The proposed compliance plan suggests that rural Alaska carriers should replace their approach to signaling, along with the DAMA satellite and the considerable benefits it brings. That suggestion disregards the costly reality of providing service in rural Alaska, and would force GCI and Alaska RLECs to divert increasingly scarce resources from ongoing service provision and potential network expansion to “upgrades” that would actually downgrade service for Alaska consumers.

The Rural Associations’ requested conditions, further, would be of little benefit to the RLECs with which GCI exchanges traffic. For example, GCI can provide a list of switches affected by its waiver, but that list is largely driven by the capabilities of the RLEC switches with

which GCI's switches must communicate. RLECs, of course, already know the capabilities of their switches.

Similarly, GCI should not be required to provide RLECs with monthly PIU or call detail records, as it has already worked with a number of Alaska RLECs to provide them with similar information in the form they prefer. GCI measures access minutes and provides monthly reports to a number of RLECs, which then bill GCI using those reports. In some cases, RLECs cannot process call detail information, so providing such records in lieu of the existing arrangements would both impose costs and burden on GCI and deny RLECs usable information. Finally, existing tariffs provide the relevant RLECs with audit rights, so no audit condition is necessary.

The Rural Associations oppose GCI's request to the extent that GCI seeks a waiver to permit it to continue to evaluate its compliance with the new Rules, develop remediation plans, and seek further additional waivers as appropriate. As GCI demonstrated in its Petition, this waiver would serve the public interest by permitting GCI to evaluate particular call signaling challenges in an orderly fashion, explore solutions, and seek waivers where appropriate. Because the call signaling ecosystem is intricate and interdependent, a measured evaluation serves the public interest by avoiding unnecessary and unintended disruptions to call routing (such as dropped calls) and by allowing for billing arrangements that work for Alaska today. This approach, further, recognizes that the Commission has adopted forward-looking reforms that will end industry reliance on the call signaling information required by the Rules, thus rendering moot many of these rules and proposed conditions.

CONCLUSION

For the forgoing reasons, GCI request that the Commission expeditiously grant GCI's requested waiver.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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