

mission shall establish an implementation schedule for compliance with the request that is consistent in time and manner with Commission regulations.

**(C) Limitation on exemption**

The exemption provided by this paragraph shall not apply with respect to a request under subsection (c) of this section from a cable operator providing video programming, and seeking to provide any telecommunications service, in the area in which the rural telephone company provides video programming. The limitation contained in this subparagraph shall not apply to a rural telephone company that is providing video programming on February 8, 1996.

**(2) Suspensions and modifications for rural carriers**

A local exchange carrier with fewer than 2 percent of the Nation's subscriber lines installed in the aggregate nationwide may petition a State commission for a suspension or modification of the application of a requirement or requirements of subsection (b) or (c) of this section to telephone exchange service facilities specified in such petition. The State commission shall grant such petition to the extent that, and for such duration as, the State commission determines that such suspension or modification—

(A) is necessary—

(i) to avoid a significant adverse economic impact on users of telecommunications services generally;

(ii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is unduly economically burdensome; or

(iii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is technically infeasible; and

(B) is consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.

The State commission shall act upon any petition filed under this paragraph within 180 days after receiving such petition. Pending such action, the State commission may suspend enforcement of the requirement or requirements to which the petition applies with respect to the petitioning carrier or carriers.

**(g) Continued enforcement of exchange access and interconnection requirements**

On and after February 8, 1996, each local exchange carrier, to the extent that it provides wireline services, shall provide exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access to interexchange carriers and information service providers in accordance with the same equal access and nondiscriminatory interconnection restrictions and obligations (including receipt of compensation) that apply to such carrier on the date immediately preceding February 8, 1996, under any court order, consent decree, or regulation, order, or policy of the Commission, until such restrictions and obligations are explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission after February 8, 1996. During the period beginning on February 8, 1996, and until such restrictions and obligations are so superseded, such restrictions and obligations shall be enforceable in the same manner as regulations of the Commission.

**(h) "Incumbent local exchange carrier" defined**

**(1) Definition**

For purposes of this section, the term "incumbent local exchange carrier" means, with respect to an area, the local exchange carrier that—

(A) on February 8, 1996, provided telephone exchange service in such area; and

(B)(i) on February 8, 1996, was deemed to be a member of the exchange carrier association pursuant to section 69.601(b) of the Commission's regulations (47 C.F.R. 69.601(b)); or

(ii) is a person or entity that, on or after February 8, 1996, became a successor or assign of a member described in clause (i).

**(2) Treatment of comparable carriers as incumbents**

The Commission may, by rule, provide for the treatment of a local exchange carrier (or class or category thereof) as an incumbent local exchange carrier for purposes of this section if—

(A) such carrier occupies a position in the market for telephone exchange service within an area that is comparable to the position occupied by a carrier described in paragraph (1);

(B) such carrier has substantially replaced an incumbent local exchange carrier described in paragraph (1); and

(C) such treatment is consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity and the purposes of this section.

**(i) Savings provision**

Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit or otherwise affect the Commission's authority under section 201 of this title.

(June 19, 1934, ch. 652, title II, §251, as added Pub. L. 104-104, title I, §101(a), Feb. 8, 1996, 110 Stat. 61; amended Pub. L. 106-81, §3(a), Oct. 26, 1999, 113 Stat. 1287.)

AMENDMENTS

1999—Subsec. (e)(3). Pub. L. 106-81 added par. (3).

**§ 252. Procedures for negotiation, arbitration, and approval of agreements**

**(a) Agreements arrived at through negotiation**

**(1) Voluntary negotiations**

Upon receiving a request for interconnection, services, or network elements pursuant to section 251 of this title, an incumbent local exchange carrier may negotiate and enter into a binding agreement with the requesting telecommunications carrier or carriers without regard to the standards set forth in subsections (b) and (c) of section 251 of this title. The agreement shall include a detailed schedule of itemized charges for interconnection and each service or network element included in the agreement. The agreement, including any interconnection agreement negotiated before February 8, 1996, shall be submitted to the State commission under subsection (e) of this section.

**(2) Mediation**

Any party negotiating an agreement under this section may, at any point in the negotia-

tion, ask a State commission to participate in the negotiation and to mediate any differences arising in the course of the negotiation.

**(b) Agreements arrived at through compulsory arbitration**

**(1) Arbitration**

During the period from the 135th to the 160th day (inclusive) after the date on which an incumbent local exchange carrier receives a request for negotiation under this section, the carrier or any other party to the negotiation may petition a State commission to arbitrate any open issues.

**(2) Duty of petitioner**

(A) A party that petitions a State commission under paragraph (1) shall, at the same time as it submits the petition, provide the State commission all relevant documentation concerning—

- (i) the unresolved issues;
- (ii) the position of each of the parties with respect to those issues; and
- (iii) any other issue discussed and resolved by the parties.

(B) A party petitioning a State commission under paragraph (1) shall provide a copy of the petition and any documentation to the other party or parties not later than the day on which the State commission receives the petition.

**(3) Opportunity to respond**

A non-petitioning party to a negotiation under this section may respond to the other party's petition and provide such additional information as it wishes within 25 days after the State commission receives the petition.

**(4) Action by State commission**

(A) The State commission shall limit its consideration of any petition under paragraph (1) (and any response thereto) to the issues set forth in the petition and in the response, if any, filed under paragraph (3).

(B) The State commission may require the petitioning party and the responding party to provide such information as may be necessary for the State commission to reach a decision on the unresolved issues. If any party refuses or fails unreasonably to respond on a timely basis to any reasonable request from the State commission, then the State commission may proceed on the basis of the best information available to it from whatever source derived.

(C) The State commission shall resolve each issue set forth in the petition and the response, if any, by imposing appropriate conditions as required to implement subsection (c) of this section upon the parties to the agreement, and shall conclude the resolution of any unresolved issues not later than 9 months after the date on which the local exchange carrier received the request under this section.

**(5) Refusal to negotiate**

The refusal of any other party to the negotiation to participate further in the negotiations, to cooperate with the State commission in carrying out its function as an arbitrator, or to continue to negotiate in good faith in the

presence, or with the assistance, of the State commission shall be considered a failure to negotiate in good faith.

**(c) Standards for arbitration**

In resolving by arbitration under subsection (b) of this section any open issues and imposing conditions upon the parties to the agreement, a State commission shall—

- (1) ensure that such resolution and conditions meet the requirements of section 251 of this title, including the regulations prescribed by the Commission pursuant to section 251 of this title;
- (2) establish any rates for interconnection, services, or network elements according to subsection (d) of this section; and
- (3) provide a schedule for implementation of the terms and conditions by the parties to the agreement.

**(d) Pricing standards**

**(1) Interconnection and network element charges**

Determinations by a State commission of the just and reasonable rate for the interconnection of facilities and equipment for purposes of subsection (c)(2) of section 251 of this title, and the just and reasonable rate for network elements for purposes of subsection (c)(3) of such section—

- (A) shall be—
  - (i) based on the cost (determined without reference to a rate-of-return or other rate-based proceeding) of providing the interconnection or network element (whichever is applicable), and
  - (ii) nondiscriminatory, and
- (B) may include a reasonable profit.

**(2) Charges for transport and termination of traffic**

**(A) In general**

For the purposes of compliance by an incumbent local exchange carrier with section 251(b)(5) of this title, a State commission shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable unless—

- (i) such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier's network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier; and
- (ii) such terms and conditions determine such costs on the basis of a reasonable approximation of the additional costs of terminating such calls.

**(B) Rules of construction**

This paragraph shall not be construed—

- (i) to preclude arrangements that afford the mutual recovery of costs through the offsetting of reciprocal obligations, including arrangements that waive mutual recovery (such as bill-and-keep arrangements); or
- (ii) to authorize the Commission or any State commission to engage in any rate

regulation proceeding to establish with particularity the additional costs of transporting or terminating calls, or to require carriers to maintain records with respect to the additional costs of such calls.

**(3) Wholesale prices for telecommunications services**

For the purposes of section 251(c)(4) of this title, a State commission shall determine wholesale rates on the basis of retail rates charged to subscribers for the telecommunications service requested, excluding the portion thereof attributable to any marketing, billing, collection, and other costs that will be avoided by the local exchange carrier.

**(e) Approval by State commission**

**(1) Approval required**

Any interconnection agreement adopted by negotiation or arbitration shall be submitted for approval to the State commission. A State commission to which an agreement is submitted shall approve or reject the agreement, with written findings as to any deficiencies.

**(2) Grounds for rejection**

The State commission may only reject—

(A) an agreement (or any portion thereof) adopted by negotiation under subsection (a) of this section if it finds that—

(i) the agreement (or portion thereof) discriminates against a telecommunications carrier not a party to the agreement; or

(ii) the implementation of such agreement or portion is not consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity; or

(B) an agreement (or any portion thereof) adopted by arbitration under subsection (b) of this section if it finds that the agreement does not meet the requirements of section 251 of this title, including the regulations prescribed by the Commission pursuant to section 251 of this title, or the standards set forth in subsection (d) of this section.

**(3) Preservation of authority**

Notwithstanding paragraph (2), but subject to section 253 of this title, nothing in this section shall prohibit a State commission from establishing or enforcing other requirements of State law in its review of an agreement, including requiring compliance with intrastate telecommunications service quality standards or requirements.

**(4) Schedule for decision**

If the State commission does not act to approve or reject the agreement within 90 days after submission by the parties of an agreement adopted by negotiation under subsection (a) of this section, or within 30 days after submission by the parties of an agreement adopted by arbitration under subsection (b) of this section, the agreement shall be deemed approved. No State court shall have jurisdiction to review the action of a State commission in approving or rejecting an agreement under this section.

**(5) Commission to act if State will not act**

If a State commission fails to act to carry out its responsibility under this section in any

proceeding or other matter under this section, then the Commission shall issue an order preempting the State commission's jurisdiction of that proceeding or matter within 90 days after being notified (or taking notice) of such failure, and shall assume the responsibility of the State commission under this section with respect to the proceeding or matter and act for the State commission.

**(6) Review of State commission actions**

In a case in which a State fails to act as described in paragraph (5), the proceeding by the Commission under such paragraph and any judicial review of the Commission's actions shall be the exclusive remedies for a State commission's failure to act. In any case in which a State commission makes a determination under this section, any party aggrieved by such determination may bring an action in an appropriate Federal district court to determine whether the agreement or statement meets the requirements of section 251 of this title and this section.

**(f) Statements of generally available terms**

**(1) In general**

A Bell operating company may prepare and file with a State commission a statement of the terms and conditions that such company generally offers within that State to comply with the requirements of section 251 of this title and the regulations thereunder and the standards applicable under this section.

**(2) State commission review**

A State commission may not approve such statement unless such statement complies with subsection (d) of this section and section 251 of this title and the regulations thereunder. Except as provided in section 253 of this title, nothing in this section shall prohibit a State commission from establishing or enforcing other requirements of State law in its review of such statement, including requiring compliance with intrastate telecommunications service quality standards or requirements.

**(3) Schedule for review**

The State commission to which a statement is submitted shall, not later than 60 days after the date of such submission—

(A) complete the review of such statement under paragraph (2) (including any reconsideration thereof), unless the submitting carrier agrees to an extension of the period for such review; or

(B) permit such statement to take effect.

**(4) Authority to continue review**

Paragraph (3) shall not preclude the State commission from continuing to review a statement that has been permitted to take effect under subparagraph (B) of such paragraph or from approving or disapproving such statement under paragraph (2).

**(5) Duty to negotiate not affected**

The submission or approval of a statement under this subsection shall not relieve a Bell operating company of its duty to negotiate the terms and conditions of an agreement under section 251 of this title.

**(g) Consolidation of State proceedings**

Where not inconsistent with the requirements of this chapter, a State commission may, to the extent practical, consolidate proceedings under sections 214(e), 251(f), 253 of this title, and this section in order to reduce administrative burdens on telecommunications carriers, other parties to the proceedings, and the State commission in carrying out its responsibilities under this chapter.

**(h) Filing required**

A State commission shall make a copy of each agreement approved under subsection (e) of this section and each statement approved under subsection (f) of this section available for public inspection and copying within 10 days after the agreement or statement is approved. The State commission may charge a reasonable and non-discriminatory fee to the parties to the agreement or to the party filing the statement to cover the costs of approving and filing such agreement or statement.

**(i) Availability to other telecommunications carriers**

A local exchange carrier shall make available any interconnection, service, or network element provided under an agreement approved under this section to which it is a party to any other requesting telecommunications carrier upon the same terms and conditions as those provided in the agreement.

**(j) "Incumbent local exchange carrier" defined**

For purposes of this section, the term "incumbent local exchange carrier" has the meaning provided in section 251(h) of this title.

(June 19, 1934, ch. 652, title II, §252, as added Pub. L. 104-104, title I, §101(a), Feb. 8, 1996, 110 Stat. 66.)

## REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in subsec. (g), was in the original "this Act", meaning act June 19, 1934, ch. 652, 48 Stat. 1064, known as the Communications Act of 1934, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see section 609 of this title and Tables.

**§ 253. Removal of barriers to entry****(a) In general**

No State or local statute or regulation, or other State or local legal requirement, may prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting the ability of any entity to provide any interstate or intrastate telecommunications service.

**(b) State regulatory authority**

Nothing in this section shall affect the ability of a State to impose, on a competitively neutral basis and consistent with section 254 of this title, requirements necessary to preserve and advance universal service, protect the public safety and welfare, ensure the continued quality of telecommunications services, and safeguard the rights of consumers.

**(c) State and local government authority**

Nothing in this section affects the authority of a State or local government to manage the public rights-of-way or to require fair and rea-

sonable compensation from telecommunications providers, on a competitively neutral and non-discriminatory basis, for use of public rights-of-way on a nondiscriminatory basis, if the compensation required is publicly disclosed by such government.

**(d) Preemption**

If, after notice and an opportunity for public comment, the Commission determines that a State or local government has permitted or imposed any statute, regulation, or legal requirement that violates subsection (a) or (b) of this section, the Commission shall preempt the enforcement of such statute, regulation, or legal requirement to the extent necessary to correct such violation or inconsistency.

**(e) Commercial mobile service providers**

Nothing in this section shall affect the application of section 332(c)(3) of this title to commercial mobile service providers.

**(f) Rural markets**

It shall not be a violation of this section for a State to require a telecommunications carrier that seeks to provide telephone exchange service or exchange access in a service area served by a rural telephone company to meet the requirements in section 214(e)(1) of this title for designation as an eligible telecommunications carrier for that area before being permitted to provide such service. This subsection shall not apply—

(1) to a service area served by a rural telephone company that has obtained an exemption, suspension, or modification of section 251(c)(4) of this title that effectively prevents a competitor from meeting the requirements of section 214(e)(1) of this title; and

(2) to a provider of commercial mobile services.

(June 19, 1934, ch. 652, title II, §253, as added Pub. L. 104-104, title I, §101(a), Feb. 8, 1996, 110 Stat. 70.)

**§ 254. Universal service****(a) Procedures to review universal service requirements****(1) Federal-State Joint Board on universal service**

Within one month after February 8, 1996, the Commission shall institute and refer to a Federal-State Joint Board under section 410(c) of this title a proceeding to recommend changes to any of its regulations in order to implement sections 214(e) of this title and this section, including the definition of the services that are supported by Federal universal service support mechanisms and a specific timetable for completion of such recommendations. In addition to the members of the Joint Board required under section 410(c) of this title, one member of such Joint Board shall be a State-appointed utility consumer advocate nominated by a national organization of State utility consumer advocates. The Joint Board shall, after notice and opportunity for public comment, make its recommendations to the Commission 9 months after February 8, 1996.