

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEVADA**

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION,

Plaintiff,

v.

AUTOMATED ELECTRONIC CHECKING,
INC.,
a Nevada corporation;

JOHN P. LAWLESS, individually, and as an
officer of Automated Electronic Checking,
Inc; and

KENNETH MARK TURVILLE,
individually, and as an officer of Automated
Electronic Checking, Inc.,

Defendants.

3:13-cv-00056-RCJ-WGC

**STIPULATED
PERMANENT
INJUNCTION AND FINAL
ORDER**

Plaintiff, the Federal Trade Commission (“FTC” or the “Commission”), has filed a Complaint against Defendants Automated Electronic Checking, Inc. (“AEC”), John P. Lawless (“Lawless”), and Kenneth Mark Turville (“Turville”) (collectively, “Defendants”), for a permanent injunction and other equitable relief in this action, pursuant to Section 13(b) of the Federal Trade Commission Act (“FTC Act”), 15 U.S.C. § 53(b). Plaintiff and Defendants, by and through their counsel, hereby stipulate to the entry of, and request the Court to enter, this Stipulated Permanent Injunction and Final Order (“Order”), to resolve all matters of dispute between them in this action.

IT IS THEREFORE STIPULATED, AGREED, AND ORDERED as follows:

1. This Court has jurisdiction over the subject matter and all of the parties in this

case.

2. Venue is proper as to all parties in this District under 15 U.S.C. § 53(b) and 28 U.S.C. §§ 1391(b) and (c).

3. The activities of Defendants are in or affecting commerce, as “commerce” is defined in Section 4 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. § 44.

4. The facts that Plaintiff has stated in its Complaint, if true, would state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45(a).

5. Defendants have entered into this Order freely and without coercion, and without admitting or denying the allegations set forth in the Commission's Complaint and for settlement purposes only, Defendants acknowledge that they have read the provisions of this Order and are prepared to abide by them.

6. Plaintiff and Defendants, by and through their counsel, have agreed that the entry of this Order resolves all matters of dispute between them arising from the Complaint in this action, up to the date of entry of this Order.

7. Defendants waive all rights to seek appellate review or otherwise challenge or contest the validity of this Order. Defendants further waive and release any claim they may have against Plaintiff, its employees, representatives, or agents.

8. Defendants agree that this Order does not entitle Defendants to seek or to obtain attorneys' fees as a prevailing party under the Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2412, and Defendants further waive any rights to attorneys' fees that may arise under said provision of law.

9. Entry of this Order is in the public interest.

ORDER

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this Order, the following definitions shall apply:

1. “Corporate Defendant” means Automated Electronic Checking, Inc., and its successors and assigns.
2. “Defendants” means all of the Individual Defendants and the Corporate Defendant, individually, collectively, or in any combination.
3. “Individual Defendant” and “Individual Defendants” mean, individually or collectively, John P. Lawless and Kenneth Mark Turville.
4. “Order” means this Stipulated Permanent Injunction and Final Order.
5. “Payment Processing,” for purposes of this Order only, means directly or indirectly providing a merchant, entity, or person with the means to access any consumer’s bank, credit card, prepaid/stored value card, or other non-telephone financial account using methods including but not limited to Remotely Created Payment Orders, Remotely Created Checks, Automated Clearing House (ACH) Debits, credit card transactions, debit card transactions, and prepaid/stored value card transactions. Whether accomplished through the use of software or otherwise, Payment Processing may include, among other things, the performance of any function of collecting, preparing, formatting, charging, or transmitting consumer bank account, credit card data, debit card data, or prepaid or stored value card data, for use in connection with the debiting, charging, or accessing of a consumer’s bank account, credit card account, or prepaid or stored value card account; monitoring, tracking, and reconciling payments, returns, and charge-backs; providing pre-authorization, post-authorization, and refund services to merchants; and disbursing funds receipts to merchants.

6. “Remotely Created Check” or “RCC” means a check that is not created by the paying bank and that does not bear a signature applied, or purported to be applied, by the person on whose financial account the check is drawn. A Remotely Created Check is often also referred to as a “demand draft,” “bank draft,” “bank check,” or “preauthorized draft.” For purposes of this definition, a Remotely Created Check originates as a paper-based transaction, but can be processed subsequently through electronic means (such as through check imaging or scanning) or through non-electronic means.

7. “Remotely Created Payment Order” or “RCPO” means a payment instruction or order drawn on a person’s financial account that is initiated or created by the payee and that does not bear a signature applied, or purported to be applied, by the person on whose financial account the order is drawn, and which is deposited into or cleared through the check clearing system. For purposes of this definition, unlike a Remotely Created Check, a Remotely Created Payment Order does not originate as a paper-based transaction. A Remotely Created Payment Order is created when a seller, merchant, payment processor, or other entity enters financial account and routing numbers into an electronic check template that is converted into an electronic file for deposit into the check clearing system.

8. “Telephone-Billed Transaction” means any purchase or purported purchase of a good or service that is charged to a consumer’s telephone bill, including any voice mail or audiotext service, but excluding (1) purchases solely of common carrier transmission services; and (2) purchases of services accessed by dialing a 900 number or other number that can be blocked by the Line Subscriber pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 228(c).

9. The words “and” and “or” shall be understood to have both conjunctive and disjunctive meanings.

I.

PROHIBITED CONDUCT

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Defendants, whether acting directly or through any person, corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, are hereby permanently restrained and enjoined from Payment Processing, and from licensing, renting, or providing software to any third party for use in providing Payment Processing services.

Provided, however, that this section shall not prohibit Defendant John P. Lawless from employment with any business entity or person that provides Payment Processing as a function of its business operations, so long as Defendant Lawless's participation in such employment is unrelated to the provision, sale, or arrangement of Payment Processing.

IT IS ALSO ORDERED that Defendants are hereby permanently enjoined from violating, directly or through any corporation, subsidiary or other entity, any provision of the Federal Trade Commission's 900-Number Rule, 16 C.F.R. Part 308, attached hereto.

II.

INJUNCTION AGAINST PROVIDING SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants, and those persons in active concert or participation with them who receive actual notice of this Order by personal service or otherwise, whether acting directly or through any person, corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, are permanently restrained and enjoined from providing substantial assistance or support to any merchant, when Defendants know, or consciously avoid knowing, that the merchant is engaged in deceptive or unfair practices prohibited by Section 5 of the FTC Act or in any violation of the FTC's 900-Number Rule.

III.

PROHIBITION ON REFERRAL SERVICES

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants, whether acting directly or through any person, corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, are permanently restrained and enjoined from referring, directly or indirectly, to any third party in exchange for any payment or fee, any client and its principals for whom Defendants have provided Payment Processing services.

IV.

**PROHIBITION ON USE OF
CONSUMER ACCOUNT INFORMATION**

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants, whether acting directly or through any corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, are permanently restrained and enjoined from selling, renting, brokering, purchasing, leasing, transferring, or otherwise disclosing consumers' bank account or credit card account numbers, that Defendants have received in connection with Payment Processing services, to any third party; provided, however, that Defendants may utilize or disclose or transmit such consumer account information to others:

1. as requested by the FTC pursuant to Section VI (Cooperation Provisions) of this Order; or
2. as required by law, regulation, or court order.

V.

**PROHIBITION ON DECEPTIVE PRACTICES RELATING TO TELEPHONE-BILLED
TRANSACTIONS AND ON PROVIDING TELEPHONE BILLING SERVICES
FOR UNAUTHORIZED TRANSACTIONS**

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants, whether acting directly or through any

corporation, subsidiary, division, or other device, are hereby permanently restrained and enjoined from:

1. Directly or indirectly misrepresenting, expressly or by implication, that a consumer is obligated to pay any charge related to a Telephone-Billed Transaction that has not been expressly authorized; and
2. Billing a consumer or directly or indirectly causing a consumer to be billed, or collecting or attempting to collect payment, directly or indirectly, from a consumer, for a Telephone-Billed Transaction, unless the charge for such Telephone-Billed Transaction was expressly authorized by the consumer.

VI.

COOPERATION PROVISIONS

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants shall, in connection with this action or any subsequent investigations related to or associated with the transactions or the occurrences that are the subject of the FTC's Complaint, cooperate in good faith with the FTC and other law enforcement agencies, appear or cause its representatives to appear, at such places and times as the FTC shall reasonably request, after written notice, for interviews, conferences, pretrial discovery, review of documents, and for such other matters as may be reasonably requested by the FTC. Within 5 days of the entry of this Order, Defendants shall provide the FTC complete data regarding all consumer financial transactions processed, directly or indirectly, by Electronic Financial Processing, Inc. (including the consumer name, address, account number, date and amount of attempted debit transaction, date and amount of returned transaction, if applicable, Total Return Rate, and return reasons), without the service of a subpoena. In addition, if requested in writing by the FTC, Defendants shall appear, or cause its representatives to appear,

and provide truthful testimony in any trial, deposition, or other proceeding related to or associated with the transactions or the occurrences that are the subject of the Complaint, without the service of a subpoena.

VII.

EQUITABLE MONETARY RELIEF

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that:

- A. Judgment is hereby entered in favor of the Commission and against the Defendants, jointly and severally, in the amount of \$950,000, for equitable monetary relief.
- B. Such payment shall be made within 14 business days of entry of this Order or by February 8, 2013, whichever is later, by electronic fund transfer in accordance with the wiring instructions provided by a representative of the Commission.
- C. Defendants shall release and relinquish to the Commission all rights, title, and interests to any and all unpaid funds derived from the provision or arrangement of Payment Processing services for RCPOs or RCCs, including but not limited to distributions, dividends, commissions, reserve funds, or income received after the date of this Order. Upon receipt of any such funds, Defendants shall immediately transfer such funds to the Commission in accordance with the wiring instructions provided by a representative of the Commission, without any reduction or offset of the full amount received by Defendants.
- D. All funds paid to the Commission pursuant to this Order shall be deposited into a fund administered by the Commission or its agent to be used for equitable relief, including but not limited to consumer redress and any attendant expenses for the

administration of any equitable relief. In the event that direct redress to consumers is wholly or partially impracticable or that funds remain after redress is completed, the Commission may apply any remaining funds for such other equitable relief (including consumer information remedies) as it determines to be reasonably related to the Defendants' practices alleged in the Complaint. Any funds not used for such equitable relief shall be deposited into the United States Treasury as disgorgement. Defendants shall have no right to challenge the Commission's choice of remedies under this Order. The Defendants shall have no right to contest the manner of distribution chosen by the Commission.

- E. No portion of any payment under the Judgment herein shall be deemed a payment of any fine, penalty, or punitive assessment.
- F. Defendants relinquish all dominion, control, and title to the funds paid to the fullest extent permitted by law. Defendants shall make no claim to or demand for return of the funds, directly or indirectly, through counsel or otherwise.
- G. Subject to the Stipulation at ¶ 5, page 2, Defendants agree that the facts as alleged in the Complaint filed in this action shall be taken as true without further proof in any bankruptcy case or subsequent civil litigation pursued by the Commission to enforce its rights to any payment or money judgment pursuant to this Order, including but not limited to a nondischargeability complaint in any bankruptcy case. Defendants further stipulate and agree that the facts alleged in the Complaint establish all elements necessary to sustain an action by the Commission pursuant to Section 523(a)(2)(A) of the Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. § 523(a)(2)(A), and that this Order shall have collateral estoppel effect for such

purposes.

- H. Defendants agree that they will not, directly or indirectly, take any deduction, capital loss, or other tax benefit on any federal, state, or local tax return for the payment made toward satisfaction of the judgment set forth in Section VII. Within ten (10) days of receipt of a written request from a representative of the Commission, Defendants must take all necessary steps, such as filing completed IRS Forms 4506 or 8821, to cause the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or other tax authority to provide any requested tax information directly to the Commission. The requested information can include amended tax returns and any other filings that Defendants have the authority to release, including those of any businesses that any Defendant, individually or collectively with any other Defendant, is the majority owner of or directly or indirectly controls.
- I. In accordance with 31 U.S.C. § 7701, Defendants are hereby required, unless they have done so already, to furnish to the Commission all taxpayer identifying numbers, including Social Security and employer identification numbers, which shall be used for purposes of collecting and reporting on any delinquent amount arising out of Defendants' relationship with Plaintiff.

VIII.

ORDER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants obtain acknowledgments of receipt of this Order:

- A. Each Defendant, within 7 days of entry of this Order, must submit to the Commission an acknowledgment of receipt of this Order sworn under penalty of

perjury.

- B. For 5 years after entry of this Order, each Individual Defendant for any business that such Defendant, individually or collectively with any other Defendant, is the majority owner or directly or indirectly controls, and each Corporate Defendant, must deliver a copy of this Order to
- (1) all principals, officers, directors, and managers; and (2) all employees, agents, and representatives who participate in conduct related to the subject matter of this Order. Delivery must occur within 7 days of entry of this Order for current personnel. To all others, delivery must occur before they assume their responsibilities.
- C. From each individual or entity to which a Defendant delivered a copy of this Order, that Defendant must obtain, within 30 days, a signed and dated acknowledgment of receipt of this Order.

IX.

COMPLIANCE REPORTING

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants make timely submissions to the Commission:

- A. One hundred and eighty (180) days after entry of this Order, each Defendant must submit a compliance report, sworn under penalty of perjury.
1. Each Defendant must: (a) designate at least one telephone number and an email, physical, and postal address as points of contact, which representatives of the Commission may use to communicate with Defendant; (b) identify all of that Defendant's businesses by all of their

names, telephone numbers, and physical, postal, email, and Internet addresses; (c) describe the activities of each business, including the products and services offered, the means of advertising, marketing, and sales, and the involvement of any other Defendant (which Individual Defendants must describe if they know or should know due to their own involvement); (d) describe in detail whether and how that Defendant is in compliance with each Section of this Order; and (e) provide a copy of each Order Acknowledgment pursuant to this Order, unless previously submitted to the Commission;

2. Additionally, each Individual Defendant must: (a) identify all telephone numbers and all email, Internet, physical, and postal addresses, including all residences; (b) identify all titles and roles in all business activities, including any business for which such Defendant performs services whether as an employee or otherwise and any entity in which such Defendant has any ownership interest; and (c) describe in detail such Defendant's involvement in each such business, including title, role, responsibilities, participation, authority, control, and any ownership.

B. For 20 years following entry of this Order, each Defendant must submit a compliance notice, sworn under penalty of perjury, within 14 days of any change in the following:

1. Each Defendant must report any change in: (a) any designated point of contact; or (b) the structure of any Corporate Defendant or any entity that Defendant has any ownership interest in or directly or indirectly controls

that may affect compliance obligations arising under this Order, including: creation, merger, sale, or dissolution of the entity or any subsidiary, parent, or affiliate that engages in any acts or practices subject to this Order.

2. Additionally, each Individual Defendant must report any change in: (a) name, including aliases or fictitious name, or residence address; or (b) title or role in any business activity, including any business for which such Defendant performs services whether as an employee or otherwise and any entity in which such Defendant has any ownership interest, and identify its name, physical address, and Internet address, if any.
- C. Each Defendant must submit to the Commission notice of the filing of any bankruptcy petition, insolvency proceeding, or any similar proceeding by or against such Defendant within 14 days of its filing.
- D. Any submission to the Commission required by this Order to be sworn under penalty of perjury must be true and accurate and comply with 28 U.S.C. § 1746, such as by concluding: “I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on:_____” and supplying the date, signatory’s full name, title (if applicable), and signature.
- E. Unless otherwise directed by a Commission representative in writing, all submissions to the Commission pursuant to this Order must be emailed to DEbrief@ftc.gov or sent by overnight courier (not the U.S. Postal Service) to:

Associate Director for Enforcement

Bureau of Consumer Protection
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20580
RE: FTC v. Automated Electronic Checking, Inc., Civil Action No.
3:13-cv-00056

X.

RECORDKEEPING

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Defendants must create certain records for 20 years after entry of the Order, and retain each such record for 5 years. Specifically, Corporate Defendant and each Individual Defendant for any business in which that Defendant, individually or collectively with any other Defendants, is a majority owner or directly or indirectly controls, must maintain the following records:

- A. Accounting records showing the revenues from all goods or services sold, all costs incurred in generating those revenues, and the resulting net profit or loss;
- B. Personnel records showing, for each person providing services, whether as an employee, independent contractor, or otherwise, that person's: name, addresses, and telephone numbers; job title or position; dates of service; and, if applicable, the reason for termination;
- C. Client files containing the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the clients, client application forms and supporting documentation submitted to Defendants; contracts entered into with Defendants; and any other client information obtained in the ordinary course of business;
- D. Complaints and refund requests, whether received directly or indirectly, such as through a third party, and any responses to such complaints or requests;

- E. Copies of all Defendants' Internet websites, advertisements, or other marketing materials, including screenshots of affiliate websites bearing advertisements or other marketing materials for Defendants' products or services; and
- F. All records necessary to demonstrate full compliance with each provision of this Order, including all submissions to the Commission.

XI.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, for the purpose of monitoring Defendants' compliance with this Order:

- A. Within 14 days of receipt of a written request from a representative of the Commission, each Defendant must: submit additional compliance reports or other requested information, which must be sworn under penalty of perjury; appear for depositions; and produce documents, for inspection and copying. The Commission is also authorized to obtain discovery, without further leave of court, using any of the procedures prescribed by Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 29, 30 (including telephonic depositions), 31, 33, 34, 36, 45, and 69.
- B. For matters concerning this Order, the Commission is authorized to communicate directly with each Defendant. Defendant must permit representatives of the Commission to interview any employee or other person affiliated with any Defendant who has agreed to such an interview. The person interviewed may have counsel present.
- C. The Commission may use all other lawful means, including posing, through its representatives, as consumers, suppliers, or other individuals or entities, to

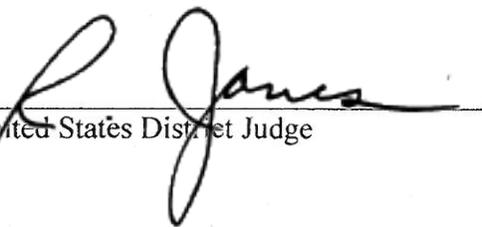
Defendants or any individual or entity affiliated with Defendants, without the necessity of identification or prior notice. Nothing in this Order limits the Commission's lawful use of compulsory process, pursuant to Sections 9 and 20 of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 49, 57b-1.

XII.

RETENTION OF JURISDICTION

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Court shall retain jurisdiction of this matter for purposes of construction, modification, and enforcement of this Order.

SO ORDERED, this 11th day of March, 2013.


United States District Judge

SO STIPULATED AND AGREED:

FOR DEFENDANT AUTOMATED ELECTRONIC CHECKING, INC.


Matthew Oster

Dated: 12-6-2012

Counsel for Automated Electronic Checking, Inc., &
Counsel for John P. Lawless, and Counsel for Kenneth Mark Turville

FOR DEFENDANT JOHN P. LAWLESS and AUTOMATED ELECTRONIC CHECKING, INC.


John P. Lawless, Defendant
Individually and as an officer of
Automated Electronic Checking, Inc.

Dated: 11/28/2012

FOR DEFENDANT KENNETH MARK TURVILLE and AUTOMATED ELECTRONIC CHECKING, INC.



Kenneth Mark Turville, Defendant
Individually and as an officer of
Automated Electronic Checking, Inc.

Dated: 11-27-2012

FOR PLAINTIFF THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION:



Janet Ammerman
Michelle A. Chua
Paul B. Spelman
Attorneys

Dated: 2-5-2013

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Rm. 286
Washington, D.C. 20580
Phone: (202) 326-3145 (Ammerman); 3248 (Chua); 2487 (Spelman)
Fax: (202) 326-3395
Email: jammerman1@ftc.gov; mchua@ftc.gov; pspelman@ftc.gov

PART 308—TRADE REGULATION RULE PURSUANT TO THE TELEPHONE DISCLOSURE AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION ACT OF 1992

- Sec.
308.1 Scope of regulations in this part.
308.2 Definitions.
308.3 Advertising of pay-per-call services.
308.4 Special rule for infrequent publications.
308.5 Pay-per-call service standards.
308.6 Access to information.
308.7 Billing and collection for pay-per-call services.
308.8 Severability.
308.9 Rulemaking review.

AUTHORITY: Pub. L. 102-556, 106 Stat. 4181 (15 U.S.C. 5701, et seq.)

SOURCE: 58 FR 42400, Aug. 9, 1993, unless otherwise noted.

§ 308.1 Scope of regulations in this part.

This rule implements titles II and III of the Telephone Disclosure and Dispute Resolution Act of 1992, to be codified in relevant part at 15 U.S.C. 5711-14, 5721-24.

§ 308.2 Definitions.

(a) *Bona fide educational service* means any pay-per-call service dedicated to providing information or instruction relating to education, subjects of academic study, or other related areas of school study.

(b) *Commission* means the Federal Trade Commission.

(c) *Pay-per-call service* has the meaning provided in section 228 of the Communications Act of 1934, 47 U.S.C. 228.¹

(d) *Person* means any individual, partnership, corporation, association, government or governmental subdivision or agency, or other entity.

(e)(1) *Presubscription or comparable arrangement* means a contractual agreement in which

(i) The service provider clearly and conspicuously discloses to the consumer all material terms and conditions associated with the use of the

¹Section 228 of the Communications Act of 1934 states:

(1) The term *pay-per-call services* means any service—

(A) In which any person provides or purports to provide—

(i) Audio information or audio entertainment produced or packaged by such person;

(ii) Access to simultaneous voice conversation services; or

(iii) Any service, including the provision of a product, the charges for which are assessed on the basis of the completion of the call;

(B) For which the caller pays a per-call or per-time-interval charge that is greater than, or in addition to, the charge for transmission of the call; and

(C) Which is accessed through use of a 900 telephone number or other prefix or area code designated by the (Federal Communications) Commission in accordance with subsection (b)(5) (47 U.S.C. 228(b)(5)).

(2) Such term does not include directory services provided by a common carrier or its affiliate or by a local exchange carrier or its affiliate, or any service the charge for which is tariffed, or any service for which users are assessed charges only after entering into a presubscription or comparable arrangement with the provider of such service.

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service, including the service provider's name and address, a business telephone number which the consumer may use to obtain additional information or to register a complaint, and the rates for the service;

(ii) The service provider agrees to notify the consumer of any future rate changes;

(iii) The consumer agrees to utilize the service on the terms and conditions disclosed by the service provider; and

(iv) The service provider requires the use of an identification number or other means to prevent unauthorized access to the service by nonsubscribers.

(2) Disclosure of a credit card or charge card number, along with authorization to bill that number, made during the course of a call to a pay-per-call service shall constitute a subscription or comparable arrangement if the credit or charge card is subject to the dispute resolution requirements of the Fair Credit Billing Act and the Truth in Lending Act, as amended. No other action taken by the consumer during the course of a call to a pay-per-call service can be construed as creating a subscription or comparable arrangement.

(f) *Program-length commercial* means any commercial or other advertisement fifteen (15) minutes in length or longer or intended to fill a television or radio broadcasting or cablecasting time slot of fifteen (15) minutes in length or longer.

(g) *Provider of pay-per-call services* means any person who sells or offers to sell a pay-per-call service. A person who provides only transmission services or billing and collection services shall not be considered a provider of pay-per-call services.

(h) *Reasonably understandable volume* means at an audible level that renders the message intelligible to the receiving audience, and, in any event, at least the same audible level as that principally used in the advertisement or the pay-per-call service.

(i) *Service bureau* means any person, other than a common carrier, who provides, among other things, access to telephone service and voice storage to pay-per-call service providers.

(j) *Slow and deliberate manner* means at a rate that renders the message in-

telligible to the receiving audience, and, in any event, at a cadence or rate no faster than that principally used in the advertisement or the pay-per-call service.

(k) *Sweepstakes*, including games of chance, means a game or promotional mechanism that involves the elements of a prize and chance and does not require consideration.

§ 308.3 Advertising of pay-per-call services.

(a) *General requirements.* The following requirements apply to disclosures required in advertisements under §§ 308.3 (b)-(d), and (f):

(1) The disclosures shall be made in the same language as that principally used in the advertisement.

(2) Television video and print disclosures shall be of a color or shade that readily contrasts with the background of the advertisement.

(3) In print advertisements, disclosures shall be parallel with the base of the advertisement.

(4) Audio disclosures, whether in television or radio, shall be delivered in a slow and deliberate manner and in a reasonably understandable volume.

(5) Nothing contrary to, inconsistent with, or in mitigation of, the required disclosures shall be used in any advertisement in any medium; nor shall any audio, video or print technique be used that is likely to detract significantly from the communication of the disclosures.

(6) In any program-length commercial, required disclosures shall be made at least three times (unless more frequent disclosure is otherwise required) near the beginning, middle and end of the commercial.

(b) *Cost of the call.* (1) The provider of pay-per-call services shall clearly and conspicuously disclose the cost of the call, in Arabic numerals, in any advertisement for the pay-per-call service, as follows:

(i) If there is a flat fee for the call, the advertisement shall state the total cost of the call.

(ii) If the call is billed on a time-sensitive basis, the advertisement shall state the cost per minute and any minimum charges. If the length of the program can be determined in advance,

the advertisement shall also state the maximum charge that could be incurred if the caller listens to the complete program.

(iii) If the call is billed on a variable rate basis, the advertisement shall state, in accordance with §§ 308.3(b)(1) (i) and (ii), the cost of the initial portion of the call, any minimum charges, and the range of rates that may be charged depending on the options chosen by the caller.

(iv) The advertisement shall disclose any other fees that will be charged for the service.

(v) If the caller may be transferred to another pay-per-call service, the advertisement shall disclose the cost of the other call, in accordance with §§ 308.3(b)(1) (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv).

(2) For purposes of § 308.3(b), disclosures shall be made “clearly and conspicuously” as set forth in § 308.3(a) and as follows:

(i) In a television or videotape advertisement, the video disclosure shall appear adjacent to each video presentation of the pay-per-call number. However, in an advertisement displaying more than one pay-per-call number with the same cost, the video disclosure need only appear adjacent to the largest presentation of the pay-per-call number. Each letter or numeral of the video disclosure shall be, at a minimum, one-half the size of each letter or numeral of the pay-per-call number to which the disclosure is adjacent. In addition, the video disclosure shall appear on the screen for the duration of the presentation of the pay-per-call number. An audio disclosure shall be made at least once, simultaneously with a video presentation of the disclosure. However, no audio presentation of the disclosure is required in: (A) An advertisement fifteen (15) seconds or less in length in which the pay-per-call number is not presented in the audio portion, or (B) an advertisement in which there is no audio presentation of information regarding the pay-per-call service, including the pay-per-call number. In an advertisement in which the pay-per-call number is presented *only* in the audio portion, the cost of the call shall be delivered immediately following the first and last delivery of the pay-per-call number, except that in

a program-length commercial, the disclosure shall be delivered immediately following each delivery of the pay-per-call number.

(ii) In a print advertisement, the disclosure shall be placed adjacent to each presentation of the pay-per-call number. However, in an advertisement displaying more than one pay-per-call number with the same cost, the disclosure need only appear adjacent to the largest presentation of the pay-per-call number. Each letter or numeral of the disclosure shall be, at a minimum, one-half the size of each letter or numeral of the pay-per-call number to which the disclosure is adjacent.

(iii) In a radio advertisement, the disclosure shall be made at least once, and shall be delivered immediately following the first delivery of the pay-per-call number. In a program-length commercial, the disclosure shall be delivered immediately following each delivery of the pay-per-call number.

(c) *Sweepstakes; games of chance.* (1) The provider of pay-per-call services that advertises a prize or award or a service or product at no cost or for a reduced cost, to be awarded to the winner of any sweepstakes, including games of chance, shall clearly and conspicuously disclose in the advertisement the odds of being able to receive the prize, award, service, or product at no cost or reduced cost. If the odds are not calculable in advance, the advertisement shall disclose the factors used in calculating the odds. Either the advertisement or the preamble required by § 308.5(a) for such service shall clearly and conspicuously disclose that no call to the pay-per-call service is required to participate, and shall also disclose the existence of a free alternative method of entry, and either instructions on how to enter, or a local or toll-free telephone number or address to which consumers may call or write for information on how to enter the sweepstakes. Any description or characterization of the prize, award, service, or product that is being offered at no cost or reduced cost shall be truthful and accurate.

(2) For purposes of § 308.3(c), disclosures shall be made “clearly and conspicuously” as set forth in § 308.3(a) and as follows:

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(i) In a television or videotape advertisement, the disclosures may be made in either the audio or video portion of the advertisement. If the disclosures are made in the video portion, they shall appear on the screen in sufficient size and for sufficient time to allow consumers to read and comprehend the disclosures.

(ii) In a print advertisement, the disclosures shall appear in a sufficient size and prominence and such location to be readily noticeable, readable and comprehensible.

(d) *Federal programs.* (1) The provider of pay-per-call services that advertises a pay-per-call service that is not operated or expressly authorized by a Federal agency, but that provides information on a Federal program, shall clearly and conspicuously disclose in the advertisement that the pay-per-call service is not authorized, endorsed, or approved by any Federal agency. Advertisements providing information on a Federal program shall include, but not be limited to, advertisements that contain a seal, insignia, trade or brand name, or any other term or symbol that reasonably could be interpreted or construed as implying any Federal government connection, approval, or endorsement.

(2) For purposes of §308.3(d), disclosures shall be made “clearly and conspicuously” as set forth in §308.3(a) and as follows:

(i) In a television or videotape advertisement, the disclosure may be made in either the audio or video portion of the advertisement. If the disclosure is made in the video portion, it shall appear on the screen in sufficient size and for sufficient time to allow consumers to read and comprehend the disclosure. The disclosure shall begin within the first fifteen (15) seconds of the advertisement.

(ii) In a print advertisement, the disclosure shall appear in a sufficient size and prominence and such location to be readily noticeable, readable and comprehensible. The disclosure shall appear in the top one-third of the advertisement.

(iii) In a radio advertisement, the disclosure shall begin within the first fifteen (15) seconds of the advertisement.

(e) *Prohibition on advertising to children.* (1) The provider of pay-per-call services shall not direct advertisements for such pay-per-call services to children under the age of 12, unless the service is a bona fide educational service.

(2) For the purposes of this regulation, advertisements directed to children under 12 shall include: any pay-per-call advertisement appearing during or immediately adjacent to programming for which competent and reliable audience composition data demonstrate that more than 50% of the audience is composed of children under 12, and any pay-per-call advertisement appearing in a periodical for which competent and reliable readership data demonstrate that more than 50% of the readership is composed of children under 12.

(3) For the purposes of this regulation, if competent and reliable audience composition or readership data does not demonstrate that more than 50% of the audience or readership is composed of children under 12, then the Commission shall consider the following criteria in determining whether an advertisement is directed to children under 12:

(i) Whether the advertisement appears in a publication directed to children under 12, including, but not limited to, books, magazines and comic books;

(ii) Whether the advertisement appears during or immediately adjacent to television programs directed to children under 12, including, but not limited to, children’s programming as defined by the Federal Communications Commission, animated programs, and after-school programs;

(iii) Whether the advertisement appears on a television station or channel directed to children under 12;

(iv) Whether the advertisement is broadcast during or immediately adjacent to radio programs directed to children under 12, or broadcast on a radio station directed to children under 12;

(v) Whether the advertisement appears on the same video as a commercially-prepared video directed to children under 12, or preceding a movie directed to children under 12 shown in a movie theater;

(vi) Whether the advertisement or promotion appears on product packaging directed to children under 12; and

(vii) Whether the advertisement, regardless of when or where it appears, is directed to children under 12 in light of its subject matter, visual content, age of models, language, characters, tone, message, or the like.

(f) *Advertising to individuals under the age of 18.* (1) The provider of pay-per-call services shall ensure that any pay-per-call advertisement directed primarily to individuals under the age of 18 shall contain a clear and conspicuous disclosure that all individuals under the age of 18 must have the permission of such individual's parent or legal guardian prior to calling such pay-per-call service.

(2) For purposes of § 308.3(f), disclosures shall be made "clearly and conspicuously" as set forth in § 308.3(a) and as follows:

(i) In a television or videotape advertisement, each letter or numeral of the video disclosure shall be, at a minimum, one-half the size of each letter or numeral of the largest presentation of the pay-per-call number. The video disclosure shall appear on the screen for sufficient time to allow consumers to read and comprehend the disclosure. An audio disclosure shall be made at least once, simultaneously with a video presentation of the disclosure. However, no audio presentation of the disclosure is required in: (A) An advertisement fifteen (15) seconds or less in length in which the pay-per-call number is not presented in the audio portion, or (B) an advertisement in which there is no audio presentation of information regarding the pay-per-call service, including the pay-per-call number.

(ii) In a print advertisement, each letter or numeral of the disclosure shall be, at a minimum, one-half the size of each letter or numeral of the largest presentation of the pay-per-call number.

(3) For the purposes of this regulation, advertisements directed primarily to individuals under 18 shall include: Any pay-per-call advertisement appearing during or immediately adjacent to programming for which competent and reliable audience composition data demonstrate that more than

50% of the audience is composed of individuals under 18, and any pay-per-call advertisement appearing in a periodical for which competent and reliable readership data demonstrate that more than 50% of the readership is composed of individuals under 18.

(4) For the purposes of this regulation, if competent and reliable audience composition or readership data does not demonstrate that more than 50% of the audience or readership is composed of individuals under 18, then the Commission shall consider the following criteria in determining whether an advertisement is directed primarily to individuals under 18:

(i) Whether the advertisement appears in publications directed primarily to individuals under 18, including, but not limited to, books, magazines and comic books;

(ii) Whether the advertisement appears during or immediately adjacent to television programs directed primarily to individuals under 18, including, but not limited to, mid-afternoon weekday television shows;

(iii) Whether the advertisement is broadcast on radio stations that are directed primarily to individuals under 18;

(iv) Whether the advertisement appears on a cable or broadcast television station directed primarily to individuals under 18;

(v) Whether the advertisement appears on the same video as a commercially-prepared video directed primarily to individuals under 18, or preceding a movie directed primarily to individuals under 18 shown in a movie theater; and

(vi) Whether the advertisement, regardless of when or where it appears, is directed primarily to individuals under 18 in light of its subject matter, visual content, age of models, language, characters, tone, message, or the like.

(g) *Electronic tones in advertisements.* The provider of pay-per-call services is prohibited from using advertisements that emit electronic tones that can automatically dial a pay-per-call service.

(h) *Telephone solicitations.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall ensure that any telephone message that solicits calls to the pay-per-call service

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discloses the cost of the call in a slow and deliberate manner and in a reasonably understandable volume, in accordance with §§ 308.3(b)(1)(i)-(v).

(i) *Referral to toll-free telephone numbers.* The provider of pay-per-call services is prohibited from referring in advertisements to an 800 telephone number, or any other telephone number advertised as or widely understood to be toll-free, if that number violates the prohibition concerning toll-free numbers set forth in § 308.5(i).

§ 308.4 Special rule for infrequent publications.

(a) The provider of any pay-per-call service that advertises a pay-per-call service in a publication that meets the requirements set forth in § 308.4(c) may include in such advertisement, in lieu of the cost disclosures required by § 308.3(b), a clear and conspicuous disclosure that a call to the advertised pay-per-call service may result in a substantial charge.

(b) The provider of any pay-per-call service that places an alphabetical listing in a publication that meets the requirements set forth in § 308.4(c) is not required to make any of the disclosures required by §§ 308.3 (b), (c), (d) and (f) in the alphabetical listing, provided that such listing does not contain any information except the name, address and telephone number of the pay-per-call provider.

(c) The publication referred to in § 308.4 (a) and (b) must be:

- (1) Widely distributed;
- (2) Printed annually or less frequently; and
- (3) One that has an established policy of not publishing specific prices in advertisements.

§ 308.5 Pay-per-call service standards.

(a) *Preamble message.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall include, in each pay-per-call message, an introductory disclosure message (“preamble”) in the same language as that principally used in the pay-per-call message, that clearly, in a slow and deliberate manner and in a reasonably understandable volume:

(1) Identifies the name of the provider of the pay-per-call service and describes the service being provided;

(2) Specifies the cost of the service as follows:

(i) If there is a flat fee for the call, the preamble shall state the total cost of the call;

(ii) If the call is billed on a time-sensitive basis, the preamble shall state the cost per minute and any minimum charges; if the length of the program can be determined in advance, the preamble shall also state the maximum charge that could be incurred if the caller listens to the complete program;

(iii) If the call is billed on a variable rate basis, the preamble shall state, in accordance with §§ 308.5(a)(2) (i) and (ii), the cost of the initial portion of the call, any minimum charges, and the range of rates that may be charged depending on the options chosen by the caller;

(iv) Any other fees that will be charged for the service shall be disclosed, as well as fees for any other pay-per-call service to which the caller may be transferred;

(3) Informs the caller that charges for the call begin, and that to avoid charges the call must be terminated, three seconds after a clearly discernible signal or tone indicating the end of the preamble;

(4) Informs the caller that anyone under the age of 18 must have the permission of parent or legal guardian in order to complete the call; and

(5) Informs the caller, in the case of a pay-per-call service that is not operated or expressly authorized by a Federal agency but that provides information on a Federal program, or that uses a trade or brand name or any other term that reasonably could be interpreted or construed as implying any Federal government connection, approval or endorsement, that the pay-per-call service is not authorized, endorsed, or approved by any Federal agency.

(b) *No charge to caller for preamble message.* The provider of pay-per-call services is prohibited from charging a caller any amount whatsoever for such a service if the caller hangs up at any time prior to three seconds after the signal or tone indicating the end of the preamble described in § 308.5(a). However, the three-second delay, and the

message concerning such delay described in §308.5(a)(3), is not required if the provider of pay-per-call services offers the caller an affirmative means (such as pressing a key on a telephone keypad) of indicating a decision to incur the charges.

(c) *Nominal cost calls.* The preamble described in §308.5(a) is not required when the entire cost of the pay-per-call service, whether billed as a flat rate or on a time sensitive basis, is \$2.00 or less.

(d) *Data service calls.* The preamble described in §308.5(a) is not required when the entire call consists of the non-verbal transmission of information.

(e) *Bypass mechanism.* The provider of pay-per-call services that offers to frequent callers or regular subscribers to such services the option of activating a bypass mechanism to avoid listening to the preamble during subsequent calls shall not be deemed to be in violation of §308.5(a), *provided that* any such bypass mechanism shall be disabled for a period of no less than 30 days immediately after the institution of an increase in the price for the service or a change in the nature of the service offered.

(f) *Billing limitations.* The provider of pay-per-call services is prohibited from billing consumers in excess of the amount described in the preamble for those services and from billing for any services provided in violation of any section of this rule.

(g) *Stopping the assessment of time-based charges.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall stop the assessment of time-based charges immediately upon disconnection by the caller.

(h) *Prohibition on services to children.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall not direct such services to children under the age of 12, unless such service is a bona fide educational service. The Commission shall consider the following criteria in determining whether a pay-per-call service is directed to children under 12:

(1) Whether the pay-per-call service is advertised in the manner set forth in §§308.3(e) (2) and (3); and

(2) Whether the pay-per-call service, regardless of when or where it is advertised, is directed to children under 12,

in light of its subject matter, content, language, featured personality, characters, tone, message, or the like.

(i) *Prohibition concerning toll-free numbers.* Any person is prohibited from using an 800 number or other telephone number advertised as or widely understood to be toll-free in a manner that would result in:

(1) The calling party being assessed, by virtue of completing the call, a charge for the call;

(2) The calling party being connected to an access number for, or otherwise transferred to, a pay-per-call service;

(3) The calling party being charged for information conveyed during the call unless the calling party has a presubscription or comparable arrangement to be charged for the information; or

(4) The calling party being called back collect for the provision of audio or data information services, simultaneous voice conversation services, or products.

(j) *Disclosure requirements for billing statements.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall ensure that any billing statement for such provider's charges shall:

(1) Display any charges for pay-per-call services in a portion of the consumer's bill that is identified as not being related to local and long distance telephone charges;

(2) For each charge so displayed, specify the type of service, the amount of the charge, and the date, time, and, for calls billed on a time-sensitive basis, the duration of the call; and

(3) Display the local or toll-free telephone number where consumers can obtain answers to their questions and information on their rights and obligations with regard to their use of pay-per-call services, and can obtain the name and mailing address of the provider of pay-per-call services.

(k) *Refunds to consumers.* The provider of pay-per-call services shall be liable for refunds or credits to consumers who have been billed for pay-per-call services, and who have paid the charges for such services, pursuant to pay-per-call programs that have been found to have violated any provision of this rule or any other Federal rule or law.

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(1) *Service bureau liability.* A service bureau shall be liable for violations of the rule by pay-per-call services using its call processing facilities where it knew or should have known of the violation.

§ 308.6 Access to information.

Any common carrier that provides telecommunication services to any provider of pay-per-call services shall make available to the Commission, upon written request, any records and financial information maintained by such carrier relating to the arrangements (other than for the provision of local exchange service) between such carrier and any provider of pay-per-call services.

§ 308.7 Billing and collection for pay-per-call services.

(a) *Definitions.* For the purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) *Billing entity* means any person who transmits a billing statement to a customer for a telephone-billed purchase, or any person who assumes responsibility for receiving and responding to billing error complaints or inquiries.

(2) *Billing error* means any of the following:

(i) A reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase that was not made by the customer nor made from the telephone of the customer who was billed for the purchase or, if made, was not in the amount reflected on such statement.

(ii) A reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase for which the customer requests additional clarification, including documentary evidence thereof.

(iii) A reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase that was not accepted by the customer or not provided to the customer in accordance with the stated terms of the transaction.

(iv) A reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase for a call made to an 800 or other toll free telephone number.

(v) The failure to reflect properly on a billing statement a payment made by the customer or a credit issued to the

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customer with respect to a telephone-billed purchase.

(vi) A computation error or similar error of an accounting nature on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase.

(vii) Failure to transmit a billing statement for a telephone-billed purchase to a customer's last known address if that address was furnished by the customer at least twenty days before the end of the billing cycle for which the statement was required.

(viii) A reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase that is not identified in accordance with the requirements of § 308.5(j).

(3) *Customer* means any person who acquires or attempts to acquire goods or services in a telephone-billed purchase, or who receives a billing statement for a telephone-billed purchase charged to a telephone number assigned to that person by a providing carrier.

(4) *Preexisting agreement* means a "presubscription or comparable arrangement," as that term is defined in § 308.2(e).

(5) *Providing carrier* means a local exchange or interexchange common carrier providing telephone services (other than local exchange services) to a vendor for a telephone-billed purchase that is the subject of a billing error complaint or inquiry.

(6) *Telephone-billed purchase* means any purchase that is completed solely as a consequence of the completion of the call or a subsequent dialing, touch tone entry, or comparable action of the caller. Such term does not include:

(i) A purchase by a caller pursuant to a preexisting agreement with a vendor;

(ii) Local exchange telephone services or interexchange telephone services or any service that the Federal Communications Commission determines by rule—

(A) Is closely related to the provision of local exchange telephone services or interexchange telephone services; and

(B) Is subject to billing dispute resolution procedures required by Federal or state statute or regulation; or

(iii) The purchase of goods or services that is otherwise subject to billing dispute resolution procedures required by Federal statute or regulation.

(7) *Vendor* means any person who, through the use of the telephone, offers goods or services for a telephone-billed purchase.

(b) *Initiation of billing review.* A customer may initiate a billing review with respect to a telephone-billed purchase by providing the billing entity with notice of a billing error no later than 60 days after the billing entity transmitted the first billing statement that contains a charge for such telephone-billed purchase. If the billing error is the reflection on a billing statement of a telephone-billed purchase not provided to the customer in accordance with the stated terms of the transaction, the 60-day period shall begin to run from the date the goods or services are delivered or, if not delivered, should have been delivered, if such date is later than the date the billing statement was transmitted. A billing error notice shall:

(1) Set forth or otherwise enable the billing entity to identify the customer's name and the telephone number to which the charge was billed;

(2) Indicate the customer's belief that the statement contains a billing error and the type, date, and amount of such; and

(3) Set forth the reasons for the customer's belief, to the extent possible, that the statement contains a billing error.

(c) *Disclosure of method of providing notice; presumption if oral notice is permitted.* A billing entity shall clearly and conspicuously² disclose on each billing statement or on other material accompanying the billing statement the method (oral or written) by which the customer may provide notice to initiate review of a billing error in the manner set forth in §308.7(b). If oral notice is permitted, any customer who orally communicates an allegation of a billing error to a billing entity shall be presumed to have properly initiated a

billing review in accordance with the requirements of §308.7(b).

(d) *Response to customer notice.* A billing entity that receives notice of a billing error as described in §308.7(b) shall:

(1) Send a written acknowledgement to the customer including a statement that any disputed amount need not be paid pending investigation of the billing error. This shall be done no later than forty (40) days after receiving the notice, unless the action required by §308.7(d)(2) is taken within such 40-day period; and

(2)(i) Correct the billing error and credit the customer's account for any disputed amount and any related charges, and notify the customer of the correction. The billing entity also shall disclose to the customer that collection efforts may occur despite the credit, and shall provide the names, mailing addresses, and business telephone numbers of the vendor and providing carrier, as applicable, that are the subject of the telephone-billed purchase, or provide the customer with a local or toll-free telephone number that the customer may call to obtain this information directly. However, the billing entity is not required to make the disclosure concerning collection efforts if the vendor, its agent, or the providing carrier, as applicable, will not collect or attempt to collect the disputed charge; or

(ii) Transmit an explanation to the customer, after conducting a reasonable investigation (including, where appropriate, contacting the vendor or providing carrier),³ setting forth the reasons why it has determined that no

³If a customer submits a billing error notice alleging either the nondelivery of goods or services or that information appearing on a billing statement has been reported incorrectly to the billing entity, the billing entity shall not deny the assertion unless it conducts a reasonable investigation and determines that the goods or services were actually delivered as agreed or that the information was correct. There shall be a rebuttable presumption that goods or services were actually delivered to the extent that a vendor or providing carrier produces documents prepared and maintained in the ordinary course of business showing the date on, and the place to, which the goods or services were transmitted or delivered.

²The standard for "clear and conspicuous" as used in this section shall be the standard enunciated by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in its Official Staff Commentary on Regulation Z, which requires simply that the disclosures be in a reasonably understandable form. See 12 CFR part 226, Supplement I, Comment 226.5(a)(1)-1.

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billing error occurred or that a different billing error occurred from that asserted, make any appropriate adjustments to the customer's account, and, if the customer so requests, provide a written explanation and copies of documentary evidence of the customer's indebtedness.

(3) The action required by § 308.7(d)(2) shall be taken no later than two complete billing cycles of the billing entity (in no event later than ninety (90) days) after receiving the notice of the billing error and before taking any action to collect the disputed amount, or any part thereof. After complying with § 308.7(d)(2), the billing entity shall:

(i) If it is determined that any disputed amount is in error, promptly notify the appropriate providing carrier or vendor, as applicable, of its disposition of the customer's billing error and the reasons therefor; and

(ii) Promptly notify the customer in writing of the time when payment is due of any portion of the disputed amount determined not to be in error, which time shall be the longer of ten (10) days or the number of days the customer is ordinarily allowed (whether by custom, contract or state law) to pay undisputed amounts, and that failure to pay such amount may be reported to a credit reporting agency or subject the customer to a collection action, if that in fact may happen.

(e) *Withdrawal of billing error notice.* A billing entity need not comply with the requirements of § 308.7(d) if the customer has, after giving notice of a billing error and before the expiration of the time limits specified therein, agreed that the billing statement was correct or agreed to withdraw voluntarily the billing error notice.

(f) *Limitation on responsibility for billing error.* After complying with the provisions of § 308.7(d), a billing entity has no further responsibility under that section if the customer continues to make substantially the same allegation with respect to a billing error.

(g) *Customer's right to withhold disputed amount; limitation on collection action.* Once the customer has submitted notice of a billing error to a billing entity, the customer need not pay, and the billing entity, providing carrier, or vendor may not try to collect, any por-

tion of any required payment that the customer reasonably believes is related to the disputed amount until the billing entity receiving the notice has complied with the requirements of § 308.7(d). The billing entity, providing carrier, or vendor are not prohibited from taking any action to collect any undisputed portion of the bill, or from reflecting a disputed amount and related charges on a billing statement, provided that the billing statement clearly states that payment of any disputed amount or related charges is not required pending the billing entity's compliance with § 308.7(d).

(h) *Prohibition on charges for initiating billing review.* A billing entity, providing carrier, or vendor may not impose on the customer any charge related to the billing review, including charges for documentation or investigation.

(i) *Restrictions on credit reporting—(1) Adverse credit reports prohibited.* Once the customer has submitted notice of a billing error to a billing entity, a billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent may not report or threaten directly or indirectly to report adverse information to any person because of the customer's withholding payment of the disputed amount or related charges, until the billing entity has met the requirements of § 308.7(d) and allowed the customer as many days thereafter to make payment as prescribed by § 308.7(d)(3)(ii).

(2) *Reports on continuing disputes.* If a billing entity receives further notice from a customer within the time allowed for payment under § 308.7(i)(1) that any portion of the billing error is still in dispute, a billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent may not report to any person that the customer's account is delinquent because of the customer's failure to pay that disputed amount unless the billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent also reports that the amount is in dispute and notifies the customer in writing of the name and address of each person to whom the vendor, billing entity, providing carrier, or other agent has reported the account as delinquent.

(3) *Reporting of dispute resolutions required.* A billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent shall report in writing any subsequent resolution of any matter reported pursuant to §308.7(i)(2) to all persons to whom such matter was initially reported.

(j) *Forfeiture of right to collect disputed amount.* Any billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent who fails to comply with the requirements of §§308.7(c), (d), (g), (h), or (i) forfeits any right to collect from the customer the amount indicated by the customer, under §308.7(b)(2), to be in error, and any late charges or other related charges thereon, up to \$50 per transaction.

(k) *Prompt notification of returns and crediting of refunds.* When a vendor other than the billing entity accepts the return of property or forgives a debt for services in connection with a telephone-billed purchase, the vendor shall, within seven (7) business days from accepting the return or forgiving the debt, either:

(1) Mail or deliver a cash refund directly to the customer's address, and notify the appropriate billing entity that the customer has been given a refund, or

(2) Transmit a credit statement to the billing entity through the vendor's normal channels for billing telephone-billed purchases. The billing entity shall, within seven (7) business days after receiving a credit statement, credit the customer's account with the amount of the refund.

(l) *Right of customer to assert claims or defenses.* Any billing entity or providing carrier who seeks to collect charges from a customer for a telephone-billed purchase that is the subject of a dispute between the customer and the vendor shall be subject to all claims (other than tort claims) and defenses arising out of the transaction and relating to the failure to resolve the dispute that the customer could assert against the vendor, if the customer has made a good faith attempt to resolve the dispute with the vendor or providing carrier (other than the billing entity). The billing entity or providing carrier shall not be liable under this paragraph for any amount greater than the amount billed to the

customer for the purchase (including any related charges).

(m) *Retaliatory actions prohibited.* A billing entity, providing carrier, vendor, or other agent may not accelerate any part of the customer's indebtedness or restrict or terminate the customer's access to pay-per-call services solely because the customer has exercised in good faith rights provided by this section.

(n) *Notice of billing error rights—(1) Annual statement.* (i) A billing entity shall mail or deliver to each customer, with the first billing statement for a telephone-billed purchase mailed or delivered after the effective date of these regulations, a statement of the customer's billing rights with respect to telephone-billed purchases. Thereafter the billing entity shall mail or deliver the billing rights statement at least once per calendar year to each customer to whom it has mailed or delivered a billing statement for a telephone-billed purchase during the previous twelve months. The billing rights statement shall disclose that the rights and obligations of the customer and the billing entity, set forth therein, are provided under the federal Telephone Disclosure and Dispute Resolution Act. The statement shall describe the procedure that the customer must follow to notify the billing entity of a billing error and the steps that the billing entity must take in response to the customer's notice. If the customer is permitted to provide oral notice of a billing error, the statement shall disclose that a customer who orally communicates an allegation of a billing error is presumed to have provided sufficient notice to initiate a billing review. The statement shall also disclose the customer's right to withhold payment of any disputed amount, and that any action to collect any disputed amount will be suspended, pending completion of the billing review. The statement shall further disclose the customer's rights and obligations if the billing entity determines that no billing error occurred, including what action the billing entity may take if the customer continues to withhold payment of the disputed amount. Additionally, the statement shall inform the customer of the billing entity's obligation to forfeit

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any disputed amount (up to \$50 per transaction) if the billing entity fails to follow the billing and collection procedures prescribed by §308.7 of this rule.

(ii) A billing entity that is a common carrier may comply with §308.7(n)(1)(i) by, within 60 days after the effective date of these regulations, mailing or delivering the billing rights statement to all of its customers and, thereafter, mailing or delivering the billing rights statement at least once per calendar year, at intervals of not less than 6 months nor more than 18 months, to all of its customers.

(2) *Alternative summary statement.* As an alternative to §308.7(n)(1), a billing entity may mail or deliver, on or with each billing statement, a statement that sets forth the procedure that a customer must follow to notify the billing entity of a billing error. The statement shall also disclose the customer's right to withhold payment of any disputed amount, and that any action to collect any disputed amount will be suspended, pending completion of the billing review.

(3) *General disclosure requirements.* (i) The disclosures required by §308.7(n)(1) shall be made clearly and conspicuously on a separate statement that the customer may keep.

(ii) The disclosures required by §308.7(n)(2) shall be made clearly and conspicuously and may be made on a separate statement or on the customer's billing statement. If any of the disclosures are provided on the back of the billing statement, the billing entity shall include a reference to those disclosures on the front of the statement.

(iii) At the billing entity's option, additional information or explanations may be supplied with the disclosures required by §308.7(n), but none shall be stated, utilized, or placed so as to mislead or confuse the customer or contradict, obscure, or detract attention from the information required to be disclosed. The disclosures required by §308.7(n) shall appear separately and above any other disclosures.

(o) *Multiple billing entities.* If a telephone-billed purchase involves more than one billing entity, only one set of disclosures need be given, and the bill-

ing entities shall agree among themselves which billing entity must comply with the requirements that this regulation imposes on any or all of them. The billing entity designated to receive and respond to billing errors shall remain the only billing entity responsible for complying with the terms of §308.7(d). If a billing entity other than the one designated to receive and respond to billing errors receives notice of a billing error as described in §308.7(b), that billing entity shall either: (1) Promptly transmit to the customer the name, mailing address, and business telephone number of the billing entity designated to receive and respond to billing errors; or (2) transmit the billing error notice within fifteen (15) days to the billing entity designated to receive and respond to billing errors. The time requirements in §308.7(d) shall not begin to run until the billing entity designated to receive and respond to billing errors receives notice of the billing error, either from the customer or from the billing entity to whom the customer transmitted the notice.

(p) *Multiple customers.* If there is more than one customer involved in a telephone-billed purchase, the disclosures may be made to any customer who is primarily liable on the account.

§ 308.8 Severability.

The provisions of this rule are separate and severable from one another. If any provision is stayed or determined to be invalid, it is the Commission's intention that the remaining provisions shall continue in effect.

§ 308.9 Rulemaking review.

No later than four years after the effective date of this Rule, the Commission shall initiate a rulemaking review proceeding to evaluate the operation of the rule.

PART 309—LABELING REQUIREMENTS FOR ALTERNATIVE FUELS AND ALTERNATIVE FUELED VEHICLES

Subpart A—General

Sec.
309.1 Definitions.