

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

In the Matter of )  
 ) CG Docket No. 24-472  
Strengthening Customer Service in the )  
Communications Industry )

**COMMENTS OF THE VOICE ON THE NET COALITION**

The Voice on the Net (“VON”) Coalition<sup>1</sup> hereby submits these comments in response to the Notice of Inquiry (the “NOI”),<sup>2</sup> wherein the Commission seeks comment on whether it should consider adopting standardized customer service requirements that would apply to voice service providers, including potentially interconnected VoIP providers.<sup>3</sup> VON opposes the adoption of such requirements. The interconnected VoIP market is highly competitive, with hundreds of options available to most consumers, making regulation unnecessary at best and harmful at worst. Moreover, the Commission lacks the legal authority to impose customer service requirements on interconnected VoIP providers. Notwithstanding, should the Commission initiate a rulemaking to adopt specific customer service requirements, it should include an exemption from those requirements for enterprise customers of voice service providers who have contracts that specifically address customer service standards.

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<sup>1</sup> The VON Coalition works to advance regulatory policies that enable Americans to take advantage of the promise and potential of internet communications. See [www.von.org](http://www.von.org).

<sup>2</sup> *Strengthening Customer Service in the Communications Industry, Notice of Inquiry*, CG Docket No. 24-472 (rel. Oct. 23, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> The NOI refers to voice service providers, which in other contexts has been defined to include VoIP providers. *NOI* at para. 2, fn. 1; see also, 47 CFR 64.3000(l)(2)(ii).

## BACKGROUND

The NOI seeks comment on whether customer service rules that today apply only to the cable television industry should be adopted for other communications sectors, including voice services.<sup>4</sup> The scope is broad, including requirements concerning service cancellation policies,<sup>5</sup> access to live representatives,<sup>6</sup> installations, outages and service calls,<sup>7</sup> automatic renewals,<sup>8</sup> and accessibility for customers with disabilities or who do not speak English.<sup>9</sup> This effort appears to be in response to the “thousands of complaints” the Commission receives each regarding customer service.<sup>10</sup> The Commission also asks whether new rules should apply to enterprise customers<sup>11</sup> and whether it has the legal authority to consider customer service rules for services not subject to Title II or Title III of the Communications Act.<sup>12</sup>

## DISCUSSION

**Regulation is unnecessary.** The interconnected VoIP market is highly competitive, with more than 1,800 service providers throughout the United States.<sup>13</sup> Providers compete based on price, service offerings and customer service. Information is readily available to consumers on company websites and through multiple third-party platforms that rate service providers

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<sup>4</sup> *NOI* at para. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at paras. 19-28.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at paras. 29-39.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at paras. 40-43.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at paras. 44-50.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at paras. 51-56.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at para. 14 and fn. 37 (noting the Commission has received approximately 22,000 customer service-related complaints since 2022).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at para. 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at para. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Voice Telephone Services: Status as of June 30, 2023, FCC Industry Analysis Division (issued November 2024) at page 10. Available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-407307A1.pdf>.

and customer forums that offer opportunities for customers to post reviews. Most critically, unhappy customers can easily transition to other service providers at little or no cost. In a highly competitive market, interconnected VoIP providers will not survive that do not meet the customer service demands of the marketplace.

The *NOI* relies on the false premise that industry has failed customers, making it difficult to resolve problems or to cancel service. This premise is based on anecdotal evidence or no evidence at all,<sup>14</sup> and the submission of 22,000 “customer service-related” complaints since 2022. This is a surprisingly small number of complaints given that hundreds of millions of Americans subscribe to voice, broadband and video services – including most to multiple services. The *NOI* does not provide the number of complaints by technology, making it difficult to determine what percentage (if any) applies to a specific service such as interconnected VoIP.

The *NOI* also ignores the potential costs to service providers to implement new rules. New customer service rules will require voice service providers to revisit their customer service practices and make necessary changes to comply with the rules. This will be both costly and burdensome. All customer service personnel will have to be trained on the new procedures. In certain cases, third parties may provide customer support; thus change orders will have to be implemented and compliance manuals rewritten. All of this takes time and requires human and financial resources that could be used to develop better products and services.

Moreover, the prospect of rules addressing installations and service calls are inapplicable to over-the-top interconnected VoIP services. Over-the-top VoIP service providers

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<sup>14</sup> For example, the *NOI* states that “it appears” that service providers make it difficult for subscribers to cancel service but provides no factual data in support. *NOI* at para. 19. Similarly, the *NOI* queries whether service providers should be required to make available customer service support based on three non-service specific complaints. *Id.* at para. 29, fn. 54.

do not provide last mile infrastructure but instead allow a user to make phone calls with the same telephone number anywhere with an internet connection. The nomadic VoIP device, much like a wireless phone, may be moved without the knowledge of the VoIP service provider.

**No authority.** The FCC has not classified interconnected VoIP as a telecommunications or an information or non-telecommunications service.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the Commission does not have authority under Title II or Title III of the Communications Act to expand the scope of regulation without a specific Congressional mandate or specific finding that an existing provision of the Act provides such separate authority. Further, the ambiguity in the *NOI* whether the reference to voice providers applies to interconnected VoIP demonstrates a lack of notice that would not survive judicial scrutiny.

**Enterprise customer exemption.** As explained above, VON opposes the adoption of customer service requirements for interconnected VoIP providers. If however, the Commission initiates a rulemaking that proposes standards, it should implement an exemption for enterprise customers of voice service providers who have contracts that specifically address customer service standards. This would be consistent with Commission rules ensuring customer privacy and data security<sup>16</sup> and the 2016 Order that imposed CPNI obligations on BIAS providers but broadly exempted business customers in certain circumstances.<sup>17</sup> In that Order, the

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., *Numbering Policies for Modern Communications*, Second Report and Order, WC Docket 20-67, at para. 49, fn. 161 (rel. Sept. 22, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> 47 C.F.R. 2010(g) (“Telecommunications carriers may bind themselves contractually to authentication regimes other than those described in this section for services they provide to their business customers that have both a dedicated account representative and a contract that specifically addresses the carriers' protection of CPNI.”)

<sup>17</sup> *Protecting the Privacy of Customers of Broadband and other Telecommunications Services*, Report and Order, WC Docket No. 16-106 (rel. Nov. 2, 2016) at paras. 306-309.

Commission found that business customers are typically able to negotiate appropriate protections in their service agreements that are specific to their individual needs and that the broad exemption would encourage service providers to compete by offering pro-customer options and contracts.<sup>18</sup>

Enterprise customers have different customer service needs and the capacity to protect their own interests in negotiations with service providers. Sophisticated enterprise customers will negotiate service agreements that will address their specific customer service needs and service providers will develop offerings to meet those needs or risk losing those customers. Applying customer service standards to enterprise services would be unnecessary and burdensome regulation, and there is no evidence in the record of a need to do so.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Commission should act in accordance with the recommendations herein

Respectfully submitted,

**VOICE ON THE NET COALITION**

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<sup>18</sup> Id. at para. 307.