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Marshall M. Criser III
Regulatory Vice President

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September 17, 1999

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CMU

Mr. Walter D'Haeseleer, Director
Division of Communications
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850

Dear Mr. D'Haeseleer:

Service standards and Commission rules have been an ongoing dialogue between BellSouth and the Florida Public Service Commission. BellSouth has worked closely with the Staff and communicated reporting issues that we have been dealing with for some time.

As you know, in the early 1990's, BellSouth initiated changes to how we gathered data for several commission service reports. The intent of these changes was to create an audit trail by eliminating any manual intervention. The unintended consequence of these changes was to significantly underreport the quality of our service. We had initially hoped to address these issues in Docket No. 950778TL, which was a response to our request for rulemaking. Unfortunately, due to the press of other issues and the rapid pace of changes in our industry, this docket was closed in May of this year, with the expectation that a new docket would be opened in order to recognize and review issues surrounding current rules and to consider issues related to changes in our industry. It is our understanding that this rulemaking docket will be opened in October. The Commission, however, has also opened Docket No. 991378 as the procedural vehicle to address BellSouth Telecommunications service standards performance.

BellSouth believes that our internal and external measurements, including customer complaints and independent service quality recognition, indicate that we provide quality customer service. However, previous inquiries from Staff and our own review of our measurement and reporting for the FPSC's service performance rules have identified issues which we intend to address. We also believe that the best interests of our customers are served by moving forward with rulemaking to identify and incorporate the service priorities for the future of our industry. To that end, we offer the following discussion and corrective action to resolve and close Docket No. 991378:

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Based on the previously referenced changes, BellSouth has measured and reported our performance for Out of Service (OOS) and Service Affecting (SA) trouble reports on the basis of the time when the report is closed, referred to as Final Status Time (FST). In comparison to reporting when the service is restored (when the trouble is cleared), referred to as Cleared and Customer Advised (CCA), the FST also includes activities such as restoring the work area to its original condition, reloading equipment, and the processing time between the field technician and the dispatch center. In order to reconcile our procedure with the Commission's current rule, BellSouth will develop and review with Staff a valid sampling methodology for extrapolating service restored time for reports from November 1999 forward. We will continue to measure FST time and will make customer rebates on the basis of that measurement. We would rather err on the side of the customer on this issue.

BellSouth is also attentive to ensuring that our force compliments our service requirements in Florida as a whole, as well as within the individual exchanges within the state. As committed to in April, 1998, we have reinstated the practice of prioritizing Out of Service reports. We have also added 921 employees to our Network organization. Fully two-thirds of these are specifically focused on improved performance in installation and repair intervals. The remaining forces are focused on improving infrastructure. As we address the reporting issue, BellSouth will review and manage its dispatch strategy, force distribution, and appointment clock intervals to address installation intervals and performance in small exchanges.

Further, as reflected in our letter to Staff dated September 15, 1999, BellSouth has reviewed the methodologies being employed for recording and reporting answer time performance. From that review, we have identified that we are using two separate methodologies to measure our performance between our Consumer and our Business organizations. In an effort to ensure that we do not overstate our performance, both methodologies have evolved to a system that underreports our performance. Further, neither is consistent with the Commission's method of measurement. To resolve this conflict and ensure consistent data between our reports and the Commission's evaluations, BellSouth will adopt the Commission's methodology for measuring the current answer time rule effective with our November 1999 report. In addition, BellSouth has added 842 employees to its business office operations. Again, as we address the reporting issues, we will monitor our performance and manage our force to meet service expectations.

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As identified in our response to the Commission's most recent service evaluation, BellSouth has also addressed the issue of answer time in our TDD Bureau. We eliminated the automated answering device from the TDD bureau. We have also completed and distributed customer education materials to reduce the number of misdirected calls by hearing customers to that number. In recognition of the Commission's continued attention to this issue, BellSouth has reemphasized in its TDD bureau procedures that an automated answering system is not compatible with the bureau's mission.

We believe we are providing superior service to our customers, as evidenced by the steady decline in Public Service Commission complaints, the lack of service complaints raised at public hearings, independent surveys of customer opinions about our service, and numerous other internal measures we use to monitor customer service. For example, in 1994, our performance in PSC infractions per 1000 access lines was .094. Today it is .0085.

While we believe that our measuring and reporting procedures have underreported our performance, we also recognize our responsibility to provide accurate reporting to the Commission, as well as good service to our customers. As previously communicated to the Commission, we are earnest in our desire to satisfactorily address the Commission's concerns and to participate in a rulemaking procedure which will allow the Commission to identify the service priorities and measurements which reflect the current and future nature of our industry. In order to resolve service performance issues and proceed with a rulemaking proceeding, BellSouth offers to make a settlement payment of \$125,000. We will also implement the corrective action identified in this letter.

Sincerely,



Marshall M. Criser III
Regulatory Vice President