

**REPORT ON THE EFFORTS OF THE
FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
TO REDUCE THE REGULATORY ASSESSMENT FEE
FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES**



As of December 2014

Office of Telecommunications

Introduction

During the 2011 legislative session House Bill CS/CS/HB 1231, the “Regulatory Reform Act” (Act), was passed and signed into law by the Governor, effective July 1, 2011. Under the Act, the Legislature eliminated most of the Florida Public Service Commission’s (PSC’s or Commission’s) retail oversight authority for the telecommunications wireline companies, yet maintained the PSC’s authority over wholesale intercarrier issues. The PSC was required to reduce its regulatory assessment fees charged to wireline telecommunications companies to reflect the concurrent reduction in PSC workload. Section 364.336(3), Florida Statutes, requires:

By January 15, 2012, and annually thereafter, the commission must report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, providing a detailed description of its efforts to reduce the regulatory assessment fee for telecommunications companies, including a detailed description of the regulatory activities that are no longer required; the commensurate reduction in costs associated with this reduction in regulation; the regulatory activities that continue to be required under this chapter; and the costs associated with those regulatory activities.

As a result of this Act, the PSC reduced its telecommunications regulatory assessment fees (RAFs) 20%, from 0.0020 to 0.0016 of companies’ gross operating revenues derived from intrastate business. This change became retroactively effective July 1, 2011. Florida telecommunications statutes have remained essentially unchanged for several years; however, the agency continues to streamline its remaining responsibilities.

Regulatory Activities That Are No Longer Required

The 2011 Act eliminated most of the retail regulation of local exchange telecommunications services by the PSC, including the elimination of rate caps on all retail telecommunications services, elimination of telecommunications-related consumer protection and assistance duties of the PSC, and elimination of the PSC’s remaining oversight of telecommunications service quality. The bill also reformed the PSC’s certification processes, authority over intercarrier matters, and other general revisions.

Consistent with the reduced authority of the PSC from the Act, the PSC has ceased the following activities over the past several years:

- The PSC no longer resolves non-basic retail consumer billing complaints.
- The PSC no longer addresses slamming or cramming complaints from consumers. The PSC continues to address slamming complaints that are reported by carriers under the Commission's wholesale authority.
- The PSC no longer publishes and distributes materials informing consumers on billing related matters or informative materials relating to the competitive telecommunications market.
- The PSC no longer designates wireless eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) in Florida for the federal universal service fund. Any wireless carrier seeking ETC status in Florida must petition the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for that authority.
- The PSC no longer performs service evaluations on carriers, with the exception of telephone relay service, nor does it investigate and resolve service related consumer complaints except as they may relate to Lifeline service, Telephone Relay Service, and payphones.
- ILECs can no longer petition the PSC for recovery of storm damage related costs and expenses.
- The PSC no longer reviews non-access service tariff filings for content, form, or format. It is the carrier's choice whether to file its rate schedules with the PSC or publicly publish the schedules elsewhere, such as the companies' websites.

There were no statutory changes in 2014 resulting in additional activities that are no longer required.

Savings

The PSC has been seeking cost savings and efforts to streamline regulatory processes for well over a decade. The origin of these streamlining efforts is not limited to the emergence and evolution of competition in the telecommunications industry. In fiscal year 1999/2000, the PSC had 401 full time positions. Through several reductions over a period of years, that number was reduced to 286 in the 2014/2015 fiscal year, a total reduction of nearly 30 percent. For 2015/2016, a further reduction of two positions has been proposed. Over the years, many of these reductions came as a result of projected workload reductions in the telecommunications area.

Effective July 2011, the PSC reduced the telecommunications RAF from 0.0020 to 0.0016 of the gross operating revenues derived from intrastate business. In addition, all local telephone service providers now pay \$600 as the minimum fee instead of varying rates based upon the service offered.¹ At the current 0.0016 rate, carriers will pay this minimum fee up to \$375,000 in gross intrastate operating revenues. The reduced RAF rate was determined assuming reduced responsibilities, projecting staff hours on continuing telecommunications workload, and projecting telecommunications company revenues. For several years, revenues from the telecommunications companies regulated by the PSC have declined as traditional wireline revenues are replaced by unregulated (VoIP/broadband) services. Also, through consolidation of companies and the maturation of the markets, the number of regulated companies has also declined. Given all these factors, the agency is evaluating the need to further reduce the telecommunications RAF rate in 2015.

Regulatory Activities That Continue To Be Required

There were 366 telecommunications companies regulated in some way by the PSC as of November 13, 2014. The Commission continues to retain authority and responsibility in the following areas for telecommunications companies:

- The PSC resolves intercarrier disputes involving interpretations and implementation of sections of the intercarrier agreements.

¹ Previously, the minimum fee ranged from \$600 to \$1,000, depending on the type of service offered. Payphone operators continue to pay a minimum fee of \$100.

- The PSC processes arbitrations of intercarrier agreements when the companies cannot negotiate all the terms of the agreement and request the PSC to resolve issues the companies define.
- The PSC reviews interconnection agreements filed with the PSC in accordance with federal requirements.
- The PSC resolves cases involving area code relief, number conservation plans, number resource reclamation, local number portability, and other numbering issues.
- The PSC analyzes information for and produces several statutorily required reports: the *Annual Report on the Status of the Telecommunications Access System Act of 1991*, the *Annual Report on Lifeline Assistance*, the *Report on the Efforts of the Florida Public Service Commission to Reduce the Regulatory Assessment Fee for Telecommunications Companies*, and the *Report on the Status of Competition in the Telecommunications Industry*.
- The PSC maintains oversight of the Florida Relay Service.
- The PSC maintains oversight of Florida's Lifeline Program including establishing eligibility criteria, coordinated enrollment, and monitoring ETCs.
- The PSC issues certificates of authority for telecommunications companies to operate in Florida, evaluating the applicant's technical, financial, and managerial capability to provide service.
- The PSC resolves consumer complaints relating to Lifeline, Telephone Relay, and payphones.
- The PSC publishes network access tariff information for all incumbent local carriers.
- The PSC publishes other tariff/rate schedule information for any certificated company if the company so decides.

- The PSC publishes and distributes informative materials relating to the Lifeline program and conducts related consumer outreach.
- The PSC monitors and/or participates in federal proceedings in cases which the state's consumers may be affected and to convey the PSC's positions and information requirements in order to achieve greater efficiency in regulation.

Efforts to Reduce Costs

The PSC continues to find ways to reduce the costs of performing its continuing duties. In 2014, the PSC initiated electronic tariff and service schedule publishing that will further reduce the number of paper documents at the agency. All telecommunications tariffs, price lists, and service schedules have been published on the agency's website. This development will allow greater access to both consumers and companies and reduce costs associated with record requests.

Other activity includes the inclusion of call testing in the upcoming Florida Relay Service contract. The recent RFP and resulting contract include call quality testing by the vendor; this will reduce the PSC's staff time required to test relay calls. Also, the telecommunications certification and certificate transfer processes have been further streamlined.

Additionally, the telecommunications staff continues to conduct periodic internal cross training on its remaining responsibilities and has developed comprehensive written Standard Operating Procedures for its functions. As staff become familiar with each other's duties, the requisite training time will be reduced should the need arise to further consolidate or transfer functions.

Summary

The PSC continues to proactively respond to the changes in its statutory authority as a result of the Act. The agency has assessed the appropriate staffing levels for the telecommunications staff, and will continue to monitor the workload and staffing needs. The agency continues to seek ways to economize its resources while maintaining a high quality work product for all industries under the PSC's authority, including telecommunications.