

State of Florida



Public Service Commission

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DATE: November 8, 2006

TO: Director, Division of the Commission Clerk & Administrative Services (Bayó)

FROM: Division of Competitive Markets & Enforcement (Casey, Moses)
Office of the General Counsel (Tan) *TJ* *PR* *PR*

RE: Docket No. 040763-TP – Request for submission of proposals for relay service, beginning in June 2005, for the hearing and speech impaired, and other implementation matters in compliance with the Florida Telecommunications Access System Act of 1991.

AGENDA: 11/21/06 – Regular Agenda – Interested Persons May Participate

COMMISSIONERS ASSIGNED: All Commissioners

PREHEARING OFFICER: Edgar

CRITICAL DATES: None

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: None

FILE NAME AND LOCATION: S:\PSC\CMP\WP\040763.RCM.DOC

Case Background

Relay service is a service that uses specialized operators that interface with hearing impaired individuals for the purpose of accessing telecommunications services and is provided pursuant to Chapter 427, Florida Statutes. The current relay provider is Sprint Communications Company L.P. (Sprint). Sprint and the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC) signed a contract¹ for the provision of relay services from June 1, 2005 through May 31, 2008². Section B, Paragraph 11(e) of the contract contains language which prohibits a relay operator

¹ Contract to Provide Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) to Florida (contract).

² The current contract also provides options for four one-year extensions after May 31, 2008.

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(communications assistant or CA) from disclosing to the telephone user that the TDD³ user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so.

Sprint has initiated a new company-wide Customer Experience Improvement Program. This customer service initiative is aimed at improving both the hearing and deaf or hard-of-hearing customer experience when they use the Sprint Relay Service. This initiative is a result of Sprint Business Development conducting customer focus groups in which customers shared that they wanted a more friendly and warm interaction with the operators. The Relay operators were very concerned about staying within the operator mode and were coming across as robotic to the customers. The customers in the focus group recommended that operators be a little more warm and friendly when interacting with them.

Sprint's Customer Experience Improvement Program was addressed at the Telecommunications Access System Act (TASA) Advisory Committee meeting on October 6, 2006, in Tallahassee. After listening to Sprint's presentation on its new customer service initiative, the TASA Advisory Committee considered a Motion to eliminate the contract verbiage stating "The CA shall not inform the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so." from Section B, Paragraph 11(e) of the Sprint Relay contract. The Motion was passed unanimously.

The purpose of this recommendation is to request an amendment to the contract with Sprint to eliminate a sentence in Section B, Paragraph 11(e) of the Sprint Relay contract which states "The CA shall not inform the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so."

³ TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) -This phone allows a Deaf individual to type and then read the response using the Florida Relay service.

Discussion of Issues

Issue 1: Should the Commission modify Section B, Paragraph 11(e) of the Request for Proposal (RFP)?

Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Commission approve the proposed change to Section B, Paragraph 11(e) of the RFP as shown below, and incorporate the change into the contract with Sprint as Amendment 2 effective upon the signature of the Commission's Executive Director and Sprint.

When the CA is asked to explain relay to a user, the CA shall express the term "explaining relay" to the other user on the call to let them know what is happening rather than transmitting all of the explanation. ~~The CA shall not inform the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so.~~ (Moses, Casey)

Staff Analysis: The current language in Paragraph 11(e) of the Sprint contract prohibits a relay communications operator from disclosing to the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so.

Customer Focus Groups conducted by Sprint have shown that customers are looking for interaction with Relay Operators who have a warm, friendly, and sincere voice tone and use less robotic phrasing. A Sprint Business Development test call study showed that when the term "deaf or hard-of-hearing" was included in the explanation phrase to the hearing party, the number of times the relay service had to be explained dropped from 26% of the calls to 12%. When the term "deaf or hard of hearing" was used during the announcement of the call the number of hang-ups during or immediately after the announcement was reduced from 10% to 2%.

Based on this feedback, Sprint implemented the use of the term "deaf or hard of hearing" in customer announcements and explanations in Relay calls in all Sprint Relay states this year with the exception of California and Florida. To date, no customer service complaints have been received regarding this improvement. Sprint would now like to implement this change in Florida, but it would require a change in the existing contract. Examples of the improved announcement are as follows:

"Hello. A person who is deaf or hard of hearing is calling you through the Florida Relay Service. This is CAxxxx. Have you received a relay call before?"

or

"Hello. A person (name if provided) is calling you through the Florida Relay Service. I'm Operator XXXX. Have you received a call from a person that has difficulties with their speech?"

Examples of the improved explanation are:

"Ok, let me explain how it works. The person who has called you is either deaf or hard of hearing. They will type their conversation and I will read it to you. When you hear the words, "Go Ahead" it is your turn to speak and I will type everything heard. Please speak directly to the caller and say "Go Ahead" when you are ready for a response."

or

"Alright well what's going to happen is that since the person who is calling you can hear and has difficulties with their speech. They will speak directly to you and I will repeat what they say. When you hear Go Ahead, please respond directly to your caller. Please say Go Ahead, each time you are through speaking."

Since the TASA Advisory Committee unanimously passed a Motion at its meeting October 6, 2006, to eliminate the wording "The CA shall not inform the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so." from the Sprint Relay contract, staff recommends to strike the language as shown below:

11(e) Procedures for Relaying Communications

When the CA is asked to explain relay to a user, the CA shall express the term "explaining relay" to the other user on the call to let them know what is happening rather than transmitting all of the explanation. ~~The CA shall not inform the telephone user that the TDD user is hearing or speech disabled unless the TDD user asks the CA to do so.~~

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Issue 2: Should this docket be closed?

Recommendation: No. This docket should remain open for the duration of the contract. (Tan)

Staff Analysis: No. This docket should remain open for the duration of the contract.