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WTA APPLAUDS FCC ACTION ON CALL COMPLETION

WASHINGTON (February 7, 2012) – The Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) applauds the Declaratory Ruling on rural call completion issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) yesterday. The Ruling reminds carriers of the FCC’s “longstanding prohibition on blocking, choking, reducing or otherwise restricting traffic” and clarifies that this prohibition extends to the routing practices that “result in lower quality service to rural or high-cost localities than like service to urban or lower cost localities.”

The FCC emphasizes that carriers are “responsible for the actions of their agents or other persons acting for or employed by the carriers.” Those found to be willfully or repeatedly in violation of these rules can be assessed fines from \$150,000 to \$1.5 million.

“The steps taken by the FCC in this ruling are a welcome tool to protect residents and businesses in rural areas from discriminatory call routing practices,” said Kelly Worthington, WTA’s Executive Vice President. “WTA and our rural allies have been working with the FCC over the past year to get to the heart of this problem, and we’re pleased the FCC has acted. In addition, we also appreciate the many Members of Congress and state utility commissioners who urged the FCC to act on behalf of their constituents.”

As noted in the Ruling, “rate-of-return carriers that serve rural areas have reported a sharp increase in complaints that long distance calls and faxes are not reaching their customers” and their customers are complaining of “poor call quality, as well as calls that ring for a prolonged period for the caller but that do not ring, or ring on an extremely delayed basis, on the receiving end.”

“The action taken by the FCC should discourage these practices that have been underway and escalating for more than a year. We will continue to be vigilant in making sure rural customers and telecommunications companies are not discriminated against. If it continues we will strongly urge the FCC to begin enforcement proceedings against repeat bad actors,” added Worthington.

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Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) is a trade association whose membership is comprised of approximately 250 rural telecommunications carriers providing high-quality voice, video and data services throughout rural areas in the 24 states west of the Mississippi River. On average, WTA member companies serve fewer than 3,000 access lines with fewer than 500 customers in each exchange. WTA's members serve some of the most rural and hard-to-serve communities in the country and are on the forefront of bringing 21st Century telecommunications services to rural America. Visit us at www.w-t-a.org.