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SURVEY BY RURAL TELECOM ASSOCIATIONS FINDS CALL COMPLETION PROBLEMS PERSIST

Complaints on the rise as consumers grow frustrated with repeated occurrences of 'dead air'

WASHINGTON (November 15, 2012) – Consumer complaints about occurrences of calls failing to complete to rural communities are steady or getting worse, according to the results of a survey conducted by four rural telecommunications associations.

The National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA), the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA), the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) and the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) today released the findings of a joint call completion survey conducted to determine the volume of consumer complaints related to calls that are not being delivered to rural areas for completion. More than 200 rural local exchange carriers in 39 states responded to the survey, which was conducted over a three-week period in October 2012.

The survey found that despite consumers' growing frustration with persistent problems receiving calls and their declining likelihood to report occurrences, volumes of complaints related to call completion are steady or rising in 62% of respondents' service areas when comparing complaints during the months of March 2012 through September 2012 and a previous testing period of August 2011 through February 2012. While a comparison of complaint volumes during both seven-month periods shows modest improvement for some respondents' service areas, call completion issues continue to occur at alarming rates, further highlighting the need for some meaningful enforcement of existing rules governing

essential communications services and the development of new solutions to combat this mounting epidemic.

“The results of this survey echo a theme that I hear over and over again from small carriers all over the country: that call completion problems are rampant in rural communities and in many cases have gotten worse over the summer and fall,” said NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield. “From Alaska to Alabama, the number of calls ending up in dead air or busy tones is on the rise. It’s clear that regulators need to step in and step up to end such bad practices once and for all.”

“The data once again illustrates what rural carriers already know—that calls to rural residents and businesses are no longer assured of going through,” said OPASTCO Senior Policy Analyst and Business Director Steve Pastorkovich. “Customers can’t reach their family members. Business is lost when companies cannot reach each other, stifling job creation. The ongoing failure to resolve the call completion problem is causing real harm in the rural communities our members serve. Case-by-case remedies are no longer sufficient. We need a lasting solution to the underlying problem without further delay.”

“It’s clear this problem still exists,” said WTA Executive Vice President Kelly Worthington, “and the FCC needs to act as soon as possible to resolve this issue. If there’s more information or other tools they need, they need to let the rural industry know. Consumers and businesses in rural areas are being hurt.”

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The National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) is a membership association of U.S. local telephone companies, dedicated to keeping customers connected on state-of-the-art communications networks. Our services help more than 1,000 members across rural America deliver high-speed multi-use broadband services. Visit us at www.neca.org.

The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) is the premier association representing more than 580 locally owned and controlled telecommunications cooperatives and commercial companies throughout rural and small-town America. NTCA provides its members with legislative, regulatory and industry representation; meetings; publications; and educational programs; and an array of employee benefit programs. Visit us at www.ntca.org.

The Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO) is the leading voice for rural telecommunications, representing approximately 420 small incumbent local exchange carriers serving rural areas of the United States. Its members include both commercial companies and cooperatives, which collectively serve more than 3 million customers. OPASTCO represents rural telecommunications interests before federal regulatory bodies and Congress, provides publications, and holds two conventions annually in January and July of each year, addressing the needs of the small telecommunications industry. The association has an

affiliate 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Foundation for Rural Education and Development (FRED). Visit us at www.opastco.org.

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.