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RURAL TELECOM ASSOCIATIONS APPLAUD FCC FOR PURSUING GREATER INVESTIGATION OF RURAL CALL COMPLETION PROBLEMS

WASHINGTON (February 7, 2013)—The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA), the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) and the National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) today applauded the FCC for taking steps to address the growing problem of rural phone calls failing to complete.

In a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) issued today, the Commission indicated its desire to obtain more robust and reliable data on a recurring basis from long-distance voice and VoIP providers that could help isolate and address rural call completion problems. The Commission also expressed interest in preventing false or “phantom” ring-back signals that lead to the calling party hearing ringing before the call has been properly set up.

Today’s NPRM follows two years of advocacy by the rural associations to put an end to the call completion epidemic. Late last year, a bipartisan group of more than 30 senators led by Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) joined the rural associations in calling on the FCC to seek a swift solution to the problem, which frustrates commerce and threatens the well-being of rural Americans.

“While we’re still reviewing the details of the FCC’s proposals, we’re encouraged by any positive step that shines a brighter spotlight on this epidemic of call failures,” said NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield. “We hope that this important step by the FCC will be paired with stricter enforcement and a commitment by providers of all kinds to end the bad practices that give rise to this problem.”

“NECA is pleased the FCC has made this preliminary step toward gathering data necessary to resolve rural call completion issues. We, along with our rural allies, have worked hard to bring call completion issues to light and applaud the

Commission's proposal to further these efforts by mandating a national data collection and requiring data retention by carriers," stated Jeff Dupree, NECA vice president-government relations.

"We're pleased the FCC has taken action beyond last year's Declaratory Ruling," said WTA's Executive Vice President Kelly Worthington, "and we hope that the findings from this NPRM are considered on an expedited basis and lead to an Order being issued soon before this problem gets any worse. In addition, enforcement proceedings against providers who don't complete calls to rural America must remain an option."

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The National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) is a membership association of U.S. local telecommunications 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 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.