

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

AirVoice Wireless, LLC
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless
Petition for Designation as an Eligible
Telecommunications Carrier

))))
Docket No. _____

**PETITION OF AIRVOICE WIRELESS, LLC D/B/A AIRTALK WIRELESS
FOR DESIGNATION AS AN ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER
IN THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA AND WAIVER OF CERTAIN RULES**

Lance J.M. Steinhart
Managing Attorney
Lance J.M. Steinhart, P.C.
1725 Windward Concourse, Suite 150
Alpharetta, Georgia 30005
(770) 232-9200 (Phone)
(770) 232-9208 (Fax)
E-Mail: lsteinhart@telecomcounsel.com

*Attorneys for AirVoice Wireless, LLC
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless*

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AirVoice Wireless, LLC)
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless)
Petition for Designation as an Eligible) Docket No. ____
Telecommunications Carrier)

I. INTRODUCTION

AirVoice Wireless, LLC d/b/a AirTalk Wireless (“AirVoice” or the “Company”), by its undersigned counsel, and pursuant to Section 214(e)(2) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the “Act”),¹ Sections 54.101 through 54.207 of the Rules of the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”),² and the rules and regulations of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”), hereby submits this Petition for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”) in the State of South Dakota (this “Petition”). Pursuant to ARSD 20:10:32:56, AirVoice also hereby petitions for waiver of ARSD 20:10:32:43.02 and ARSD 20:10:32:54(1-2), as discussed in section IV.M.1 below.

AirVoice seeks ETC designation solely to provide Lifeline service to qualifying South Dakota consumers; it will not (and is not eligible to) seek access to funds from the federal Universal Service Fund (“USF”) for the purpose of participating in the Link-Up program or providing service to high-cost areas.³

¹ 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2)

² 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.101-54.207.

³ Given that the Company only seeks Lifeline support from the low-income program and does not seek any high-cost support, ETC certification requirements for the high-cost program are not applicable to the Company.

As demonstrated herein, and as certified in Exhibit 1 attached hereto, AirVoice meets all the statutory and regulatory requirements for designation as an ETC in the State of South Dakota, including the requirements outlined in the FCC’s *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*,⁴ *Lifeline Modernization Order*,⁵ and *Fifth Report and Order*.⁶ Furthermore, AirVoice is positioned to reach unserved and underserved Lifeline-eligible consumers. Rapid grant of AirVoice’s request, therefore, would advance the public interest because it would enable the Company to commence much needed Lifeline services to a wide array of low-income South Dakota residents as soon as possible. Accordingly, the Company respectfully requests that the Commission expeditiously approve this Petition.

All correspondence, communications, pleadings, notices, orders and decisions relating to this Petition should be addressed to:

Lance J.M. Steinhart
Managing Attorney
Lance J.M. Steinhart, P.C.
Attorneys for AirVoice Wireless, LLC
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless
1725 Windward Concourse, Suite 150
Alpharetta, Georgia 30005
(770) 232-9200 (Phone)
(770) 232-9208 (Fax)
E-Mail: lsteinhart@telecomcounsel.com

⁴ *In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, Lifeline and Link Up, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training*, WC Docket No. 11-42, WC Docket No. 03-109, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 12-23, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 12-11 (rel. Feb. 6, 2012) (“*Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*”).

⁵ *In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 11-42, WC Docket No. 09-197, WC Docket No. 10-90, Third Report and Order, Further Report and Order, and Order on Reconsideration, FCC 16-38 (rel. Apr. 27, 2016) (hereinafter, “*Third Report and Order*” or “*Lifeline Modernization Order*”).

⁶ *In the Matter of Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers, Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization, Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 17-287, WC Docket No. 11-42, WC Docket No. 09-197, Fifth Report and Order, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Order on Reconsideration, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 19-111 (rel. Nov. 14, 2019) (hereinafter, “*Fifth Report and Order*”).

II. COMPANY OVERVIEW

AirVoice is a Michigan limited liability company,⁷ with its principal office located at 9920 Brooklet Drive, Houston, Texas 77099. AirVoice is a provider of commercial mobile radio service (“CMRS”) and provides prepaid wireless telecommunications services to consumers by using the underlying wireless networks of AT&T Mobility LLC and T-Mobile USA, Inc. (its “Underlying Carriers”) on a wholesale basis. AirVoice obtains the network infrastructure and wireless transmission facilities from its Underlying Carriers to allow the Company to operate as a Mobile Virtual Network Operator (“MVNO”).

AirVoice is currently designated as an ETC and providing Lifeline services in the following jurisdictions: California, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Wisconsin. AirVoice also provides non-Lifeline mobile phone services and is an approved provider of broadband services under the FCC’s Affordable Connectivity Program (“ACP”). AirVoice is a wholly owned subsidiary of VTel Holdings, LLC, a Texas limited liability company (“VTel”). Henry Hung Do, a United States citizen and a resident of the State of Texas, owns one hundred percent (100%) of: (a) VTel, which was formed to acquire 100% ownership interest in AirVoice; (b) Cintex Wireless, LLC d/b/a SFone Wireless, a Delaware limited liability company (“Cintex”), that provides Lifeline-only wireless services as an ETC in Arkansas, Maryland, Maine, Rhode Island, and West Virginia and non-Lifeline wireless services throughout the United States, and is approved to provide ACP services in over 45 jurisdictions; (c) NewPhone Wireless, LLC, a Louisiana limited liability company (“NewPhone”), that is authorized to provide non-Lifeline wireless service throughout the United States and ACP services in over 45 jurisdictions, and provides Lifeline-only wireless services as

⁷ AirVoice was formed in the State of Michigan on May 7, 1999.

an ETC in Louisiana; (d) HTH Communications, LLC, a Texas limited liability company, a global and one of the largest mobile device distributors in the United States, which has been in business for more than thirteen (13) years; (e) SofTel Technologies, LLC, a Texas limited liability company, that provides distribution services to wireless providers; and (f) Softel Holdings, LLC, a Texas limited liability company which was formed to acquire 100% ownership interest in TAG Mobile, LLC (“TAG Mobile”)⁸, a limited liability company organized under the laws of the State of Texas. TAG Mobile provides wireless Lifeline services to customers in the following nineteen (19) states in which it has been designated an ETC: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.⁹

Under current ownership, neither AirVoice nor its affiliates have been subject to enforcement sanctions related to the Low-Income Fund or ETC revocation proceedings in any state except as noted below.¹⁰

⁸ In connection with the proposed transaction with Softel Holdings, LLC (the “Transaction”), TAG Mobile formed TAG Mobile Bankruptcy Sale Entity, LLC (“New TAG Mobile”) as a wholly owned subsidiary. New TAG Mobile is a Texas limited liability company created to receive the regulated assets of TAG Mobile at the closing of the Transaction. New TAG Mobile currently owns no assets and has no debts. Upon consummation of the Transaction, New TAG Mobile will acquire all of the regulated assets of TAG Mobile, including its Lifeline customers, wireless authorizations and its designations as an ETC. Thereafter, New TAG Mobile will operate pursuant to those wireless authorizations and designations to provide Lifeline services to eligible consumers in its designated service areas.

⁹ TAG Mobile holds Section 214 authority from the FCC. Filings for necessary approvals of the Transaction in connection with this authority are pending with the FCC.

¹⁰ Pursuant to a Membership Interest Purchase Agreement dated February 6, 2019, Henry Hung Do purchased 100% of the equity of Cintex. Pursuant to an Order and Consent Decree adopted on December 22, 2017, Cintex settled a Notice of Apparent Liability with the FCC (*See* File No. EB-IHD-13-00010671), which all occurred under prior ownership and management. By Order adopted December 16, 2021 (*See* File No. EB-IHD-20-00031449), NewPhone entered into a Consent Decree with the Enforcement Bureau of the FCC for the purpose of terminating the Bureau’s investigation on whether NewPhone, as an ETC, claimed support from the Lifeline program of the Universal Service Fund (USF or Fund) for duplicate or otherwise ineligible subscribers. On September 23, 2020, the Bureau issued NewPhone an LOI to obtain information about the claims in question. NewPhone filed its response to the LOI on November 23, 2021. Within weeks after USAC notified NewPhone of the apparently improper use of beneficiary data, the Company terminated its relationship with the Marketing Agents involved in the enrollments. USAC worked with NewPhone from early August through October 2020 to address the issues raised by the claims. On October 30, 2020, NewPhone submitted revised claims which USAC agreed addressed the full amount at issue in its investigation. Because USAC determined NewPhone had promptly submitted revised claims in the full amount USAC sought, there

AirVoice will provide affordable prepaid mobile phone service and high-quality customer service. AirVoice’s service offering will include: (1) local and long-distance calling; (2) access to the following custom calling features at no charge: (a) Caller ID; (b) Call Waiting; (c) Call Forwarding; (d) 3-Way Calling; and (e) Voicemail; (3) text messaging; (4) broadband access; and (5) the option for a consumer to “bring their own device”. AirVoice may offer user-friendly handsets or hotspot devices. AirVoice’s products and plans will be specially geared toward serving lower income communities, especially in rural areas that are predominantly unserved by other ETCs designated in the state, and its service models and pricing plans will reflect this mission. The Company will not require service contracts from its customers, and it will always ensure competitively low pricing for its services and products. AirVoice will manage all aspects of the customer experience, including setting service pricing, handset selection, marketing materials, and live customer service. The Company’s prepaid, budget-friendly pricing will give many low-income consumers the option of having mobile phone service and broadband access without the burden of hidden costs, varying monthly charges, or contractual commitments. Customers will be able to customize their AirVoice service to suit their needs with AirVoice’s available bundles of minutes, broadband data, and text packages to supplement their monthly plan.

AirVoice’s Lifeline customers will be low-income consumer households, many of which are unlikely to have had phone service or broadband access of any kind prior to enrollment. AirVoice’s customers will depend on, and benefit greatly from, AirVoice’s inexpensive and flexible pricing plans. AirVoice will not impose credit checks, nor will it require any deposits or contractual commitments. AirVoice’s Customers may turn to AirVoice because they cannot afford the postpaid services provided by traditional wireless carriers. AirVoice will affirmatively reach

was no need to issue a recovery letter. To resolve the matter, NewPhone agreed to implement a compliance plan and make a \$100,000 settlement payment.

out to the low-income sector of the consumer base to offer attractive and affordable communications options. As such, AirVoice will contribute to the expansion of mobile wireless and broadband services for low-income consumers in South Dakota.

III. THE COMMISSION HAS JURISDICTION OVER DESIGNATION OF WIRELESS ETCs

Section 214(e)(2) of the Act provides state public utility commissions with the “primary responsibility” for the designation of ETCs.¹¹ Although Section 332(c)(3)(A) of the Act prohibits states from regulating the entry of or the rates charged by any provider of commercial mobile service or any private mobile service, this prohibition does not allow states to deny wireless carriers ETC status.¹² Under the Act, a state public utility commission with jurisdictional authority over ETC designations must designate a common carrier as an ETC if the carrier satisfies the requirements of Section 214(e)(1).

AirVoice recognizes that Section 214(e)(1)(A) of the Act states that ETCs shall offer services, at least in part, over their own facilities and that Section 54.201(i) of the FCC’s Rules (47 C.F.R. § 54.201(i)) prohibits state commissions from designating as an ETC a telecommunications carrier that offers services exclusively through the resale of another carrier’s services. However, the FCC has granted forbearance from enforcement of this facilities requirement to carriers seeking Lifeline-only ETC designation.¹³ Section 10(e) of the Act (47 U.S.C. § 160(e)) provides: “[a] State commission may not continue to apply or enforce any provision of this chapter that the [Federal Communications] Commission has determined to forbear from applying under subsection (a) of this section.” As such, the Commission is required by Section 10(e) to act in accordance

¹¹ 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2).

¹² *USF Order*, at 8858–59, ¶ 145.

¹³ *See Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order* at ¶ 368.

with the FCC’s grant of forbearance, and therefore, may not apply the facilities-based requirement to AirVoice. Therefore, the Commission has the authority under Section 214(e)(2) of the Act to grant AirVoice’s request for designation as an ETC throughout the State of South Dakota.

IV. AIRVOICE SATISFIES THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNATION AS AN ETC UNDER 47 C.F.R. § 54.201

Section 254(e) of the Act provides that, “only an eligible telecommunications carrier designated under section 214(e) shall be eligible to receive specific federal universal service support.” Section 214(e)(2) of the Act authorizes state commissions, such as the Commission, to designate ETC status for federal universal service purposes and authorizes the Commission to designate wireless ETCs.¹⁴ Section 214(e)(1) of the Act and Section 54.201(d) of the FCC’s rules provide that applicants for ETC designation must be common carriers that shall, throughout the designated service area, offer all of the services supported by universal service, either using their own facilities or a combination of their own facilities and the resale of another carrier’s services, except where the FCC has forbore from the “own facilities” requirement. Applicants also must commit to advertise the availability and rates of such services.¹⁵ As detailed below, AirVoice satisfies each of the above-listed requirements.

A. AirVoice Will Provide Service Consistent with the FCC’s Grant of Forbearance from Section 214’s Facilities Requirements

Although Section 214 requires ETCs to provide services using their facilities, at least in part, the FCC has forbore from that requirement with respect to carriers such as AirVoice. In the *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*, the FCC granted forbearance from the “own-facilities”

¹⁴ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 8858-59, ¶ 145 (1997) (“*USF Order*”).

¹⁵ See 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d)(2).

requirement contained in Section 214(e)(1)(A) for carriers that are, or seek to become, Lifeline-only ETCs, subject to the following conditions:¹⁶

(1) the carrier must comply with certain 911 requirements [(a) providing its Lifeline subscribers with 911 and E911 access, regardless of activation status and availability of minutes; (b) providing its Lifeline subscribers with E911-compliant handsets and replacing, at no additional charge to the subscriber, noncompliant handsets of Lifeline-eligible subscribers who obtain Lifeline-supported services; and (c) complying with conditions (a) and (b) starting on the effective date of this Order]; and

(2) the carrier must file, and the Bureau must approve, a compliance plan providing specific information regarding the carrier's service offerings and outlining the measures the carrier will take to implement the obligations contained in this Order as well as further safeguards against waste, fraud and abuse the Bureau may deem necessary.

In accordance with the *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*, AirVoice filed a Compliance Plan with the FCC, which the FCC approved on December 26, 2012.¹⁷ The FCC approved AirVoice's Revised Compliance Plan on December 23, 2021¹⁸ as the final condition to the Company's transfer of control to VTel. A copy of the Company's current FCC-Approved Compliance Plan is attached hereto as Exhibit 2. AirVoice commits to providing Lifeline service in South Dakota in accordance with its FCC-approved Compliance Plan and in compliance with applicable state and federal regulations, to the extent amendments thereto may supersede commitments made in the Compliance Plan.

B. AirVoice Is a Common Carrier

CMRS providers like AirVoice are treated as common carriers.¹⁹

¹⁶ See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order* at ¶¶ 368, 373, and 379.

¹⁷ See FCC Public Notice DA 12-2063, <https://www.fcc.gov/document/wcb-approves-nine-lifeline-compliance-plans>.

¹⁸ See Public Notice DA 21-1641, <https://www.fcc.gov/document/wcb-approves-revised-compliance-plan-airvoice-wireless-llc>.

¹⁹ *Implementation of Sections 3(n) and 332 of the Communications Act, Regulatory Treatment of Mobile Services*, GN Docket No. 93-252, Second Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 1411, 1425 ¶ 37, 1454-55 ¶ 102 (1994) (wireless resellers are included in the statutory "mobile services" category, and providers of cellular service are common carriers and CMRS providers); 47 U.S.C. § 332(c)(1)(A) ("mobile services" providers are common carriers); see also *PCIA Petition for Forbearance for Broadband PCS*, WT Docket No. 98-100, (Memorandum Opinion and Order and Notice

C. AirVoice Will Provide All Supported Services

Through its Underlying Carriers, AirVoice is able to provide all of the supported services required by Section 54.101(a) of the FCC's Rules (47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a)) as follows:

1. Voice Telephony Service

As set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a)(1), eligible Voice Telephony Services must provide the following:

Voice Grade Access to the Public Switched Telephone Network. AirVoice provides voice grade access to the public switched telephone network ("PSTN") through the purchase of wholesale CMRS services from its Underlying Carriers.

Local Usage At No Additional Charge. AirVoice offers rate plans that provide its customers with minutes of use for local service at no additional charge. In accordance with ARSD 20:10:32:43.05, AirVoice customers will have the option to apply the Lifeline discount to the Company's retail rate plans and will have the option for unlimited local calling, similar to ILEC Lifeline offerings.

Access to Emergency Services. AirVoice provides 911 and E911 access for all of its customers to the extent the local government in its service area has implemented 911 or E911 systems. As noted, calls to 911 emergency services will always be free and will be available regardless of service activation status or availability of minutes. AirVoice also complies with the FCC's regulations governing the deployment and availability of E911 compatible handsets.

Toll Limitation. In its *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*, the FCC provided that toll limitation would no longer be deemed a supported service.²⁰ "ETCs are not required to offer toll

of Proposed Rulemaking, 13 FCC Rcd 16857, 16911 ¶ 111 (1998) ("We concluded [in the *Second Report and Order*] that CMRS also includes the following common carrier services: cellular service, ... all mobile telephone services and resellers of such services.") (emphasis added).

²⁰ See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order* at ¶ 367.

limitation service to low-income consumers if the Lifeline offering provides a set amount of minutes that do not distinguish between toll and non-toll calls.”²¹ Nonetheless, AirVoice’s offerings inherently allow Lifeline subscribers to control their usage, as its wireless service is offered on a prepaid, or pay-as-you-go, basis. AirVoice’s service, moreover, is not offered on a distance-sensitive basis and local and domestic long-distance minutes are treated the same.

Equal Access. The FCC’s Rules no longer require an applicant for ETC status to provide a certification that it acknowledges that the FCC may require it to provide equal access to long distance carriers in the event that no other ETC is providing equal access within the service area. Nevertheless, in accordance with ARSD 20:10:32:43.06, the Company acknowledges that the Company may be required to provide equal access to long distance carriers in the event that no other ETC is providing equal access within the service area.

2. Broadband Internet Access Services

While no longer a supported service under 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a), AirVoice provides Broadband Internet access service (“BIAS”) in accordance with the FCC’s minimum service standards to ensure Lifeline customers receive full support. The FCC has stated that BIAS consists of the ability for a user to receive “the capability to transmit data to and receive data from all or substantially all Internet endpoints, including any capabilities that are incidental to and enable the operation of the communications service, but excluding dial-up Internet access service.”²² AirVoice provides BIAS to low-income consumers via resale of AT&T and T-Mobile services.

²¹ See *id.* at ¶ 49.

²² See 47 C.F.R. § 8.2(a).

D. AirVoice Requests Designation Throughout Its Service Area

AirVoice is not a rural telephone company as defined in Section 153(37) of the Act (47 U.S.C. § 153(37)). Accordingly, AirVoice is required to describe the geographic area(s) within which it requests designation as an ETC. AirVoice requests ETC designation in scope to allow the Company to provide Lifeline service wherever its underlying, facilities-based providers have wireless coverage, including federally recognized tribal lands. AirVoice requests designation as an ETC for its entire service area in South Dakota as demonstrated by the list of zip codes, and the map attached hereto as Exhibit 7 pursuant to ARSD 20:10:32:43(3).²³ AirVoice understands that its service area overlaps with rural carriers in South Dakota but maintains that the public interest factors described below justify its designation in these carriers' service areas, especially because it seeks ETC designation solely to utilize USF funding to provide Lifeline service to qualified low-income consumers. AirVoice is not eligible for and does not seek Link-Up or high-cost support.

Therefore, designation of AirVoice as an ETC will cause no growth in the high-cost portions of the USF and will not erode high-cost support from any rural telephone company. In fact, the FCC has determined that “[d]esignation of competitive ETCs promotes competition and benefits consumers in rural and high-cost areas by increasing customer choice, innovative services, and new technologies.”²⁴ While federal rules (47 U.S.C. §§ 160, 214(e)(5) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.207(b)) require that the service area of an ETC conform to the service area of any rural telephone company serving the same area (the “service area conformance” requirement), the

²³ A list of wire centers in which the Company requests ETC designation is also attached hereto as Exhibit 7. Because the Company seeks ETC designation solely for participation in the low-income USF programs and will not seek high-cost support, a creamskimming analysis is not applicable.

²⁴ See *Western Wireless Corporation Petition for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in the State of Wyoming*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 48, 55 (2000).

FCC's *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Memorandum Opinion and Order* (FCC 13-44 released April 15, 2013) authorized forbearance from the service area conformance requirements with respect to carriers seeking to provide Lifeline-only service.²⁵ In light of this forbearance, the Commission has the authority to designate ETCs such as AirVoice in rural areas without concern for the service area conformance requirement.²⁶

E. AirVoice Will Advertise the Availability of Supported Services

AirVoice will advertise the availability and rates for the services described above using media of general distribution as required by 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d)(2). AirVoice will comply with the FCC's rules regarding information to be included in marketing materials, including FCC rule section 54.405(c). Specifically, AirVoice's marketing materials will state, in easily understood language, that: (i) the service is a Lifeline service; (ii) Lifeline is a government assistance program; (iii) the service may not be transferred to someone else; (iv) consumers must meet certain eligibility requirements before enrolling in the Lifeline program; (v) the Lifeline program permits only one Lifeline discount per household; (vi) documentation is necessary for enrollment; and (vii) AirVoice is the provider of the services. Moreover, the Lifeline application/certification form will state that Lifeline is a federal benefit and that consumers who willfully make a false statement in order to obtain the Lifeline benefit can be punished by fine or imprisonment or can be barred from the program. Additionally, AirVoice will disclose the company name under which it does business and the details of its Lifeline service offerings in any Lifeline-related marketing and advertising.

AirVoice will engage in advertising campaigns specifically targeted to reach those likely to qualify for Lifeline service, promoting the availability of cost-effective wireless services to this

²⁵ See *In the Matter of Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Support, Lifeline and Link Up Reform*, WC Docket No. 09-197, WC Docket No. 11-42, Memorandum Opinion and Order, FCC 13-44 (rel. April 15, 2013).

²⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.207(c).

neglected consumer segment. AirVoice may also promote the availability of its Lifeline offering by distributing brochures at various state and local social service agencies and may partner with nonprofit assistance organizations in order to inform customers of the availability of its Lifeline service. In addition, AirVoice intends to utilize its network of retail partners (once established) to help promote the availability of its Lifeline plans, especially retail outlets that are frequented by low-income consumers. AirVoice will provide retail vendors with signage to be displayed where Company products are sold, and with printed materials describing the Company's Lifeline program.²⁷ AirVoice will also do on-line marketing which may include social media and other on-line channels.

²⁷ See Exhibit 6 for a sample advertisement used in other states.

V. AIRVOICE SATISFIES THE ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ETC DESIGNATION UNDER 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)

AirVoice hereby provides the additional information and certifications required for carriers seeking ETC designation as set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a).

A. Service Commitment Throughout the Proposed Designated Service Area

AirVoice will provide service in South Dakota by reselling service which it obtains from its Underlying Carriers, whose networks are operational and largely built out. Thus, AirVoice will be able to commence offering its Lifeline service to all locations served by its Underlying Carriers very soon after receiving approval from the Commission.

In accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)(1)(i), and by the certification attached in Exhibit 1, AirVoice commits to comply with the service requirements applicable to the low-income support that it receives. Pursuant to 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)(1)(ii), a common carrier seeking designation as a Lifeline-only ETC is not required to submit a five-year network improvement plan as part of its application for designation as an ETC.

In accordance with ARSD 20:10:32:43.01(1), AirVoice commits to provide service on a timely basis to requesting customers in its Designated Service Area where the applicant's network already passes the potential customer's premises, and provide service within a reasonable period of time if the potential customer is within the applicant's service area but outside its existing network coverage, if service can be provided at reasonable cost by:

- i. Modifying or replacing the requesting customer's equipment;
- ii. Deploying a roof-mounted antenna or other equipment;
- iii. Adjusting the nearest cell tower;
- iv. Adjusting network or customer facilities;
- v. Reselling services from another carrier's facilities to provide service; or
- vi. Employing, leasing or constructing an additional cell site, cell extender, repeater, or other similar equipment.

B. Ability to Remain Functional in Emergency Situations

In accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)(2), and ARSD 20:10:32:43.03 AirVoice has the ability to remain functional in emergency situations. As discussed, AirVoice will utilize the extensive and well-established network facilities of Tier 1 wireless carriers to provide its Lifeline services. The Company understands that its Underlying Carriers' networks have access to a reasonable amount of back-up power to ensure functionality without an external power source, are able to reroute traffic around damaged facilities, and are capable of managing traffic spikes resulting from emergency situations. Indeed, its Underlying Carriers have repeatedly certified to the FCC that its network functions in emergency situations.²⁸ The Underlying Carriers provide this functionality to AirVoice and its customers.

C. Commitment to Consumer Protection and Service Quality

In accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)(3), an ETC applicant must demonstrate that it will satisfy applicable consumer protection and service quality standards, and wireless applicants may satisfy this requirement with a commitment to comply with the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association's ("CTIA") Consumer Code for Wireless Service. AirVoice hereby commits to comply with the CTIA Consumer Code for Wireless Service.

D. AirVoice is Financially and Technically Capable

In accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a)(4), AirVoice is financially and technically capable of providing Lifeline-supported services and is currently offering Lifeline service in ten (10) jurisdictions. In addition, AirVoice has been providing non-Lifeline wireless service throughout the United States since 1999. AirVoice receives revenue from a number of sources which are

²⁸ See, e.g., *In the Matter of Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, Petition of AT&T USA, Inc. for Designation as a Low-Income Eligible Telecommunications Carrier, et al.*, WC Docket No. 09-197, at 20 (released Aug. 16, 2012).

completely independent from the revenue it will receive in the form of Lifeline support. AirVoice does not and will not rely exclusively on USF disbursements to operate. In addition, AirVoice's financial and technical capabilities to provide service are demonstrated by its performance over twenty-two (22) years in the wireless telephone industry, with consistently strong service, organic growth, and robust protections to ensure its Lifeline customers meet eligibility requirements. AirVoice's new ownership and affiliates will also provide additional financial, technical and managerial support as needed.

Furthermore, the senior management of AirVoice has great depth in the telecommunications industry and offers extensive telecommunications business technical and managerial expertise to AirVoice.²⁹ AirVoice will be providing resold wireless service, and therefore will also rely upon the managerial and technical expertise of its Underlying Carriers.

E. Terms and Conditions of Proposed Lifeline Offering

AirVoice has the ability to provide all services supported by the universal service program, as detailed in 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a), throughout South Dakota. AirVoice intends to be a leader in the prepaid marketplace by offering consumers exceptional value and competitive amounts of voice and broadband usage. AirVoice commits that its Lifeline-supported voice services will meet or exceed the minimum service standards set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.408, including as such standards are updated going forward. AirVoice's Lifeline-supported broadband services will also meet the minimum service standards set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.408 for mobile broadband internet access services, including for service speed and data usage allowance, as such standards are updated going forward. To the extent AirVoice provides devices for use with Lifeline-supported broadband service, such devices will meet the equipment requirements set forth in 47 C.F.R. §

²⁹ See attached Exhibit 4 for key management bios.

54.408(f), and AirVoice will not impose an additional or separate tethering charge for mobile data usage below the minimum standard.

Attached hereto as Exhibit 5 is a summary table of the Company's proposed Lifeline service offerings, showing that Lifeline customers will receive 1000 voice minutes, unlimited text messages, and 4.5 gigabytes (GB) of data per month with full access to its Underlying Carriers' networks at a net cost of \$0.00 after application of Lifeline support.³⁰ Lifeline customers that also elect to receive ACP benefits from AirVoice will receive unlimited talk and text with 15 GB data after application of Lifeline and ACP support. Customers will be able to purchase additional minutes or data as needed. All plans will include nationwide domestic long-distance at no extra per-minute charge, and AirVoice will not assess any usage for access to its free customer services (611). Emergency (911) calls will be free, regardless of service activation or availability of minutes, and will not count against the customer's airtime. The Company's Lifeline offering will provide feature-rich mobile connectivity for qualifying subscribers without the burden of credit checks or service contracts. AirVoice's prepaid offering will be an attractive alternative for consumers who need the mobility, security, and convenience of a wireless phone, but who are concerned about usage charges or long-term contracts.

F. AirVoice Will Comply with the Lifeline Certification and Verification Requirements

Customers interested in obtaining information on the Lifeline program will be directed to a toll-free telephone number and to the Company's website, www.airtalkwireless.com, which will contain information regarding the Company's Lifeline service plans, including a description of the Lifeline program and eligibility criteria. Customers must then apply directly through the National

³⁰ The current rate plan is based upon the December 2021 FCC minimum service standards ("MSS") and will change based on the future MSS. Qualified residents of federally recognized tribal lands will receive unlimited voice, text and data at zero cost.

Lifeline Eligibility Verifier (“National Verifier”), which they may do online or by submitting all required documentation to the National Verifier by mail. Customers may download a copy of the application form from the Internet (either from the National Verifier’s or Company’s website) or request that a copy be mailed to them. AirVoice utilizes the standard Lifeline application forms as required by FCC rules, and thus complies with the disclosure and information collection requirements in 47 C.F.R. § 54.410(d).³¹ AirVoice will certify and verify initial and continued consumer eligibility in accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.410 and will notify the applicant that the prepaid service must be personally activated by the subscriber and the subscriber must use their service every thirty (30) days. AirVoice further confirms that it will not provide a consumer with an activated device and will not activate a Lifeline service unless or until it has confirmed that the consumer is a qualifying low-income household pursuant to 47 C.F.R. § 54.409 and completed the required eligibility determination and certification requirements of 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.410, 54.404-54.405. Processing of consumers’ applications and determination of eligibility will be performed by the National Verifier.

G. Prevention of Waste, Fraud and Abuse

AirVoice recognizes the importance of safeguarding the USF and has implemented measures and procedures to prevent duplicate Lifeline benefits being awarded to the same household. AirVoice complies with the requirements of the National Lifeline Accountability Database (“NLAD”) and section 54.404 of the FCC’s rules. In South Dakota, the National Verifier queries the NLAD for every enrollment to determine whether a prospective subscriber is currently

³¹ *FCC Wireline Competition Bureau Provides Guidance on Universal Forms for the Lifeline Program*, WC Docket No. 11-42, Public Notice, “Wireline Competition Bureau Provides Guidance on Universal Forms for the Lifeline Program,” DA 18-161 (rel. Feb. 20, 2018). The standard application/certification forms are available on USAC’s website (See USAC, Lifeline Forms, <http://www.usac.org/li/tools/forms/default.aspx>).

receiving a Lifeline service from AirVoice or any other ETC, and whether anyone else living at the prospective subscriber's residential address is currently receiving Lifeline service. In addition, Company personnel emphasize the "one Lifeline service per household" restriction in their direct sales contacts with potential customers. Furthermore, the FCC has taken steps to curb abuse in the Lifeline program by establishing the National Verifier, which transfers the responsibility of eligibility determination away from Lifeline providers. AirVoice will rely on the National Verifier to determine initial and ongoing eligibility of South Dakota Lifeline subscribers.

Consistent with federal regulations, the Company will not seek USF reimbursement for new subscribers until they have personally activated the service, either by initiation and/or actual use of the service and will de-enroll any subscriber that has not used the Company's Lifeline service as set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.407(c)(2). An account will be considered active if the authorized subscriber establishes usage, as "usage" is defined by 47 C.F.R. § 54.407(c)(2), during the specified timeframe, currently a period of thirty (30) days, or during the notice period set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.405(e)(3), currently a period of fifteen (15) days. In accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.405(e)(3), AirVoice will provide the subscriber advanced notice, using clear, easily understood language, that the subscriber's failure to use the Lifeline service within the notice period will result in service termination for non-usage. Customers that have been deactivated may participate in the Company's Lifeline service in the future by reapplying and re-establishing eligibility.

To further protect the integrity of the USF, AirVoice contracts with a third-party Lifeline service bureau, currently CGM, LLC, to edit all subsidy request data. CGM will process and validate the Company's subsidy data to prevent: (1) Duplicate Same-Month Lifeline Subsidies (Double Dip): any name/address that is already receiving a lifeline subsidy from the Company will

be automatically prevented from receiving a second lifeline subsidy in that same month; and (2) Inactive lines receiving subsidy: CGM's systems compare all subsidy requests to underlying network status to ensure that subsidies are requested only for active lines. Moreover, through the processes described above, AirVoice ensures that it does not over-request from support funds.

H. AirVoice Will Comply with Certification and Verification Requirements

As mentioned above, AirVoice will rely on the National Verifier for initial and annual verification of Lifeline eligibility in accordance with Section 54.410 of the FCC's Rules.

I. AirVoice Will Comply With Reporting Requirements

AirVoice will provide the Commission a copy of its annual certifications and Lifeline recertification results pursuant to 47 C.F.R. § 54.416 (i.e., FCC Form 555), as well as a copy of its annual report filed pursuant to 47 C.F.R. § 54.422 (i.e., FCC Form 481), and will comply with applicable Commission reporting requirements for Lifeline ETCs.

J. AirVoice Will Comply With Regulations Imposed By The Commission

By this Petition, AirVoice hereby asserts its willingness and ability to comply with the rules and regulations that the Commission may lawfully impose upon the Company's provision of service contemplated by this Petition. Upon Commission request, AirVoice is prepared to answer questions or present additional testimony or other evidence about its services within the state. AirVoice commits that 100% of federal universal service funds will flow through directly to Lifeline customers.

1. Waiver Requests

AirVoice requests a waiver of ARSD 20:10:32:43.02, which requires that ETCs submit a two-year service quality improvement plan ("Plan"), as well as ARSD 20:10:32:54(1-2), which would require a new Plan and a progress report on the previously filed Plan. As set forth in the *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order*, a common carrier seeking designation as a Lifeline-only ETC is not required to submit a network improvement plan as part of its application for designation as an ETC.³² This guideline has no application where an applicant's requested ETC serving territory

³² See *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order* at ¶ 386.

would qualify it to receive no “high cost” USF support, but only “low income” USF support. Because AirVocie seeks ETC designation solely for purposes of reimbursement for provision of subsidized Lifeline services to eligible customers, submission of a service quality improvement plan is not required.

VI. DESIGNATION OF AIRVOICE AS AN ETC WOULD PROMOTE THE PUBLIC INTEREST

One of the principal goals of the Act, as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, is “to secure lower prices and higher quality services for American telecommunications consumers and encourage the rapid deployment of new telecommunications technologies” to all citizens, regardless of geographic location or income.³³ Designation of AirVoice as an ETC in South Dakota will further that public interest. Whether because of financial constraints, poor credit history, or intermittent employment, many low-income consumers often lack the countless choices available to most consumers and thus have yet to reap the full benefits of the intensely competitive wireless market.

The instant request for ETC designation must be examined in light of the Act’s goal of providing low-income consumers with access to telecommunications services. The primary purpose of universal service is to ensure that consumers—particularly low-income consumers—receive affordable and comparable telecommunications services. The FCC has in recent years expanded the Lifeline program to cover broadband services, noting that “Only half of all households in the lowest income tier subscribe to a broadband service and 43 percent say the

³³ *Telecommunications Act of 1996*, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56.

biggest reason for not subscribing is the cost of the service,” and “Of the low income consumers who have subscribed to mobile broadband, over 40 percent have to cancel or suspend their service due to financial constraints.”³⁴ Given this context, designating AirVoice as an ETC would significantly benefit low-income consumers eligible for Lifeline services in South Dakota—the intended beneficiaries of universal service.

A. Advantages of AirVoice’s Service Offering

AirVoice offers a unique, easy to use, competitive, and highly affordable wireless telecommunications service, which benefits qualified consumers who either have no other service alternatives or who choose a wireless prepaid solution in lieu of more traditional service. The public interest benefits of AirVoice’s wireless service include larger calling areas (as compared to traditional wireline carriers), the convenience and security afforded by mobile service, and voice and broadband access included without cost (after application of the Lifeline support), as well as a free SIM card or handset, and free access to caller ID, call waiting, and Voicemail features, and access to 911 services regardless of the number of voice minutes remaining on the Lifeline consumer’s plan. These no cost to consumer services and low-cost minutes are an invaluable resource for cash-strapped consumers, and the prepaid nature of the service also provides an alternative for “unbanked” consumers.

AirVoice’s Lifeline offerings compare favorably with those of other competitive ETCs, and provide Lifeline customers with voice minutes, text messages, and a data allotment (meeting the voice and broadband minimum service standards), at no net cost to the customer after application of Lifeline support. AirVoice’s Lifeline offering will be provided over its Underlying

³⁴ See *Lifeline Modernization Order* ¶ 2.

Carriers' networks. AirVoice's prepaid wireless service is likely to be an especially attractive option for low-income consumers because it alleviates customer concerns regarding hidden costs, varying monthly charges and long-term contract issues.

In today's market, consumers, including qualified Lifeline customers, view the portability and convenience of wireless service not as a luxury, but as a necessity. Mobile service allows children to reach their parents wherever they may be, allows a person seeking employment greater ability to be contacted by potential employers, and provides end users with the ability to contact emergency service providers regardless of location. Mobile service often also serves as a key bridge in closing the homework gap for students who live in rural areas with limited access to broadband.

With the comprehensive strength and experience of AirVoice's management team, the Company's technology-based business model, and AirVoice's solid history as a Lifeline provider, AirVoice is uniquely positioned to meet the needs of Lifeline customers, utilizing the Company's innovative outreach and high integrity enrollment process, and AirVoice remains committed to careful stewardship of the Lifeline program. Without question, prepaid wireless services have become essential for low-income customers, providing them with value for their money, access to emergency services on wireless devices, and a reliable means of contact for prospective employers, social service agencies or dependents. Providing AirVoice with the authority necessary to offer discounted Lifeline service to those without wireless service—or most in danger of losing service altogether—undoubtedly promotes the public interest.

B. The Benefits of Competitive Choice

The FCC has acknowledged the benefits to consumers of being able to choose from among a variety of telecommunications service providers for more than three decades.³⁵ Increasing customer choice promotes competition and innovation, thus spurring other carriers to target low-income consumers with service offerings tailored to their needs, ultimately resulting in improved services to consumers. Designation of AirVoice as an ETC will help ensure that quality services are available at “just, reasonable, and affordable rates” as envisioned in the Act.³⁶ Introducing AirVoice into the market as an additional wireless ETC provider will afford low-income South Dakota residents a wider choice of providers and available services while creating a competitive marketplace as ETCs compete for a finite number of Lifeline-eligible customers. Increasing the competitive marketplace of providers has the potential to effectively increase the penetration rate and reduce the number of individuals not connected to the PSTN.

C. Impact on the Universal Service Fund

With Lifeline, ETCs only receive support for customers they obtain. The amount of support available to an eligible subscriber is exactly the same whether the support is given through a company such as AirVoice or the Incumbent LEC operating in the same service area. The number of persons eligible for Lifeline support is the same regardless of the number of ETCs; thus, AirVoice will only increase the amount of USF Lifeline funding in situations where it obtains Lifeline customers not already enrolled in another ETC’s Lifeline program. By implementing the safeguards set forth in the *Lifeline and Link Up Reform Order* and utilizing the NLAD and National Verifier, the likelihood that AirVoice’s customers are not eligible or are receiving duplicative

³⁵ See, e.g., *Specialized Common Carrier Services*, 29 FCC Rcd 870 (1971).

³⁶ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

support either individually or within their household is greatly minimized. AirVoice's ability to increase the Lifeline participation rate of qualified low-income individuals will further the goal of Congress to provide all individuals with affordable access to telecommunications service, and thus any incremental increases in Lifeline expenditures are far outweighed by the significant public interest benefits of expanding the availability of affordable wireless services to low-income consumers.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, designation of AirVoice as an ETC in the State of South Dakota complies with the requirements of Section 214(e)(2) of the Act and is clearly in the public interest.

WHEREFORE, AirVoice hereby respectfully requests that the Commission promptly designate AirVoice as an ETC in the State of South Dakota for the purpose of participating in the Lifeline program, and grant the waivers requested herein.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Lance J.M. Steinhart

Lance J.M. Steinhart
Managing Attorney
Lance J.M. Steinhart, P.C.
1725 Windward Concourse, Suite 150
Alpharetta, Georgia 30005
(770) 232-9200 (Phone)
(770) 232-9208 (Fax)
E-Mail: lsteinhart@telecomcounsel.com

*Attorneys for AirVoice Wireless, LLC
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless*

March 28, 2022

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

In accordance with to ARSD 20:10:32:46, I hereby certify that, on March 9, 2022, a true and correct copy of the foregoing Application for Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Designation was sent to all the following telecommunications companies serving as ETCs within the relevant service area:

Ms. Kathryn E. Ford
Knology of the Black Hills, LLC
1241 O.G. Skinner Drive
West Point, GA 31833-1789

Mr. Steve Meyer
Brookings Municipal Telephone
P.O. Box 588
Brookings, SD 57006-0588

Mr. W. Tom Simmons
Midcontinent Communications
3901 N. Louise Avenue
Sioux Falls, SD 57107-0112

Ms. Jill Thornton
Long Lines Wireless, LLC
P.O. Box 67
Sergeant Bluff, IA 51054-0067

Mr. Mark D. Benton
Midstate Telecom, Inc.
P.O. Box 48
Kimball, SD 57355-0048

Ms. Elizabeth Kohler
RCC Minnesota, Inc.
302 Mountain View Dr., Ste. 200
Colchester, VT 05446-5824

Mr. Scott Bostrom
RC Communications Inc.
P.O. Box 196
New Effington, SD 57255-0196

Ms. Elizabeth Kohler
WWC License LLC
302 Mountain View Dr., Ste. 200
Colchester, VT 05446-5824

Mr. Jerry Heiberger
SSTelecom, Inc.
P.O. Box 920
Clear Lake, SD 57226-0920

CenturyLink, Inc.
100 CenturyTel Drive
Monroe, LA 57226-2041

Mr. James Groft
General Manager
Northern Valley Communications, LLC
PO Box 260
Groton, SD 57445-0320
jgroft@jamesvalley.com
(605) 397-2323 - voice
(605) 397-2350 – fax

Mr. James Groft
General Manager
James Valley Wireless, LLC
PO Box 260
Groton, SD 57445-0320
jgroft@jamesvalley.com

I further hereby certify that, on March 9, 2022, a true and correct copy of the foregoing Application for Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Designation was sent to all Affected Tribal Governments and Tribal Regulatory Authorities within the relevant service area:

Kevin Keckler, Chairman
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
PO Box 590
Eagle Butte, SD 57625-0590

Cyril Scott, President
Rosebud Sioux Tribe
PO Box 430
Rosebud, SD 57570-0430

Anthony Reider, President
Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe
PO Box 283
Flandreau, SD 57028-0283

Robert Shepherd, Chairman
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate
PO Box 509
Agency Village, SD 57262-0509

Michael Jandreau, Chairman
Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
PO Box 187
Lower Brule, SD 57548-0187

Charles Murphy, Chairman
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
PO Box D
Ft. Yates, ND 58538-0522

Bryan Brewer, President
Ogalala Sioux Tribe
PO Box 20720
Pine Ridge, SD 57770-2070

In accordance with to ARSD 20:10:32:46, I hereby certify that, on this day, a true and correct copy of the foregoing Application for Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Designation was sent to all the following telecommunications companies serving as ETCs within the relevant service area:

Don Snyders, General Manager
Alliance Communications Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 349
Garretson, SD 57030

John Lass, Vice President and General Manager
Citizens Telecommunications Company of Minnesota, Inc.
2378 Wilshire Blvd.
Mound City, MN 55354

Todd Hansen, General Manager
Beresford Municipal Telephone Co.
101 North 3rd Street
Beresford, SD 57004

Steve Meyer, General Manager
Citizens of Brookings Utilities, Telephone Division d/b/a Swiftel Communications
P.O. Box 588
Brookings, SD 57006

Shane Ayres, Financial Officer
City of Faith Telephone Company
P.O. Box 368
Faith, SD 57626

Robert J. Hoffman
Farmers Mutual Telephone Company
P.O. Box 368
Bellingham, MN 56212

Denny Law, General Manager
Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 411
Wall, SD 57790

Jerry Heiberger, General Manager
Interstate Telecommunications Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 920
Clear Lake, SD 57226

James Groft, General Manager
James Valley Cooperative Telephone Co.
P.O. Box 260
Groton, SD 57445-0260

Tom Connors, Manager
Jefferson Telephone Company
P.O. Box 128
Jefferson, SD 57038-0128

Bruce Hanson, General Manager
**Fort Randall Telephone Company and
Mount Rushmore Telephone**
1700 Technology Drive, Suite 100
Willmar, MN 56201

Rod Bowar, General Manager
Kennebec Telephone Company
P.O. Box 158
Kennebec, SD 57544

Director of Legal Affairs
**Knology Community Telephone, Inc. fka
Prairie Wave Community Telephone, Inc.**
1241 O.G. Skinner Drive
West Point, GA 31833

Emory Graffis
Northeast Nebraska Telephone Company
110 East Elk St.
Jackson, NE 68743

Jeffrey J. Olson
Red River Rural Telephone Association
P.O. Box 136
Abercrombie, ND 58001-0136

Ryan Thompson, General Manager
Santel Communications Cooperative
P.O. Box 67
Woonsocket, SD 57385

Bryan Roth, General Manager
TrioTel Communications, Inc.
P.O. Box 630
Salem, SD 57058

John Tormoehlen, General Manager
Valley Telecommunications Coop. Assn.
P.O. Box 7
Herreid, SD 57632

Mary Jo Biegler, Controller
Valley Telephone Company
P.O. Box 277
100 Main Street
Underwood, MN 56586

Jerry Reisenauer, General Manager
**West River Cooperative Telephone
Company**
P.O. Box 39
Bison, SD 57620-0039

Bonnie Krause, CEO/General Manager
West River Telecommunications Coop.
P.O. Box 467
Hazen, ND 58545

Wayne Johnson
Qwest Corporation d/b/a Century Link QC
925 High St., 9 South of 9
Des Moines, IA 50309

Mr. Jerry Heiberger
**Interstate Telecommunications
Cooperative, Inc. f/k/a SSTELECOM, Inc.**
P.O. Box 920
Clear Lake, SD 57226-0920

Mr. James M. Gleason
**Clarity Telecom, LLC d/b/a Vast
Broadband**
104 E Center Street, Ste. 201
Sikeston, MO 63801

Mr. Todd D. Boyd
**Stockholm-Strandburg Telephone
Company**
413 3rd Ave. S
Clear Lake, SD 57226-0977

Dated March 28, 2022

/s/ Lance J.M. Steinhart

Lance J.M. Steinhart, Esq.
Lance J.M. Steinhart, P.C.
1725 Windward Concourse, Suite 150
Alpharetta, Georgia 30005
Telephone: (770) 232-9200
Facsimile: (770) 232-9208
Email: lsteinhart@telecomcounsel.com

*Attorneys for AirVoice Wireless, LLC
d/b/a AirTalk Wireless*