

www.regulations.gov (IRS REG–130080–22, IRS REG–113064–23, or IRS REG–118492–23).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Concerning the proposed regulations, the Office of Associate Chief Counsel (Passthroughs and Special Industries), (202) 317–6835 (not a toll-free number); concerning submissions of comments, the hearing and/or to be placed on the building access list to attend the public hearing, call Vivian Hayes (202–317–6901) (not a toll-free number) or by email to publichearings@irs.gov (preferred).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject of the public hearing is the notices of proposed rulemakings (REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, REG–118492–23) that were published in the **Federal Register** on Monday, April 17, 2023, (FR 88 23370), Tuesday, October 10, 2023 (FR 88 70310), and Monday, December 4, 2023, (FR 88 84098) respectively.

The rules of 26 CFR 601.601(a)(3) apply to the hearing. Persons who wish to present oral comments at the hearing must submit an outline of the topics to be discussed and the time to be devoted to each topic by January 18, 2024.

A period of 10 minutes will be allotted to each person for making comments. An agenda showing the scheduling of the speakers will be prepared after the deadline for receiving outlines has passed. Copies of the agenda will be available free of charge at the hearing, and via the Federal eRulemaking Portal (www.Regulations.gov) under the title of Supporting & Related Material. If no outline of the topics to be discussed at the hearing is received by January 18, 2024, the public hearing will be cancelled. If the public hearing is cancelled, a notice of cancellation of the public hearing will be published in the **Federal Register**.

Individuals who want to testify in person at the public hearing must send an email to publichearings@irs.gov to have your name added to the building access list. The subject line of the email must contain the regulation number REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23 and the language TESTIFY In Person. For example, the subject line may say: Request to TESTIFY In Person at Hearing for REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23.

Individuals who want to testify by telephone at the public hearing must send an email to publichearings@irs.gov to receive the telephone number and access code for the hearing. The subject line of the email must contain the

regulation number REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23 and the language TESTIFY

Telephonically. For example, the subject line may say: Request to TESTIFY Telephonically at Hearing for REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23, whichever applies.

Individuals who want to attend the public hearing in person without testifying must also send an email to publichearings@irs.gov to have your name added to the building access list. The subject line of the email must contain the regulation number REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23 and the language ATTEND In Person. For example, the subject line may say: Request to ATTEND Hearing In Person for REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23, whichever applies. Requests to attend the public hearing must be received by 5 p.m. ET by Monday, January 29, 2024.

Individuals who want to attend the public hearing by telephone without testifying must also send an email to publichearings@irs.gov to receive the telephone number and access code for the hearing. The subject line of the email must contain the regulation number REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23 and the language ATTEND Hearing Telephonically. For example, the subject line may say: Request to ATTEND Hearing Telephonically for REG–130080–22, REG–113064–23, and REG–118492–23, whichever applies. Requests to attend the public hearing must be received by 5:00 p.m. ET by Monday, January 29, 2024.

Hearings will be made accessible to people with disabilities. To request special assistance during a hearing please contact the Publications and Regulations Section of the Office of Associate Chief Counsel (Procedure and Administration) by sending an email to publichearings@irs.gov (preferred) or by telephone at (202) 317–6901 (not a toll-free number) by 5:00 p.m. ET on Friday, January 26, 2024.

Any questions regarding speaking at or attending a public hearing may also be emailed to publichearings@irs.gov.

Oluwafunmilayo A. Taylor,

Section Chief, Publications and Regulations Section, Associate Chief Counsel (Procedure and Administration).

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

47 CFR Part 1

[WC Docket No. 17–84; FCC 23–109; FR ID 193610]

Accelerating Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment

AGENCY: Federal Communications Commission.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: In this document, the Commission adopted a Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) that tentatively concludes that the Commission should take further action to facilitate the processing of pole attachment applications that are submitted in large numbers. It also seeks comment on whether the Commission should modify its self-help rules to enable prospective attachers to access poles more quickly. Finally, it seeks comment on the impact of contractor availability when attachers seek to use their own contractors when conducting self-help or one-touch make-ready for surveys and make-ready work.

DATES: Comments are due on or before February 13, 2024, and reply comments are due on or before February 28, 2024. Written comments on the Paperwork Reduction Act proposed information collection requirements must be submitted by the public, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and other interested parties on or before March 11, 2024.

ADDRESSES: Pursuant to sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR 1.415, 1.419, interested parties may file comments and reply comments on or before the dates indicated in this document. Comments and reply comments may be filed using the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS). See *Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings*, 63 FR 24121 (1998). Interested parties may file comments or reply comments, identified by CG Docket No. 17–59 and WC Docket No. 17–97 by any of the following methods:

- *Electronic Filers:* Comments may be filed electronically by accessing ECFS at <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/>.

- *Paper Filers:* Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing. Paper filings can be sent by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail.

- Effective March 19, 2020, and until further notice, the Commission no

longer accepts any hand or messenger delivered filings.

- Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.

- U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail must be addressed to 45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554.

In addition to filing comments with the Secretary, a copy of any comments on the Paperwork Reduction Act proposed information collection requirements contained herein should be submitted to the Federal Communications Commission via email to PRA@fcc.gov and to Nicole Ongele, FCC, via email to Nicole.Ongele@fcc.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information, please contact either Michele Berlove, Assistant Division Chief, Competition Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, at michele.berlove@fcc.gov or at (202) 418-1477, or Michael Ray, Attorney Advisor, Competition Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, at michael.ray@fcc.gov or at (202) 418-0357. For additional information concerning the Paperwork Reduction Act proposed information collection requirements contained in this document, send an email to PRA@fcc.gov or contact Nicole Ongele at (202) 418-2991.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This is a summary of the Commission's Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) in WC Docket No. 17-84, FCC 23-109, adopted on December 13, 2023, and released on December 15, 2023. The full text of this document is available for public inspection at the following internet address: <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-seeks-make-pole-attachment-process-faster-more-transparent-and-more-cost-effective>. The Providing Accountability Through Transparency Act, Public Law 118-9, requires each agency, in providing notice of a rulemaking, to post online a brief plain-language summary of the proposed rule. The required summary of this FNPRM is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/proposed-rulemakings>. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (e.g., Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at (202) 418-0530.

Initial Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 Analysis

This document may contain proposed information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13.

Comments should address: (a) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Commission, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Commission's burden estimates; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information collected; (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on the respondents, including the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology; and (e) way to further reduce the information collection burden on small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107-198, see 44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(4), we seek specific comment on how we might further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees.

Comment Period and Filing Procedures

Pursuant to sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR 1.415, 1.419, interested parties may file comments and reply comments on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this document. Comments may be filed using the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS) or by paper. Commenters should refer to WC Docket No. 21-341 when filing in response to this FNPRM.

- *Electronic Filers:* Comments may be filed electronically by accessing ECFS at <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs>.

- *Paper Filers:* Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing. Paper filings can be sent by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail.

- Effective March 19, 2020, and until further notice, the Commission no longer accepts any hand or messenger delivered filings.

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U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority Mail must be addressed to 45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554.

People with Disabilities: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (TTY).

Synopsis

I. Introduction

1. Access to a broadband connection is a necessity of modern life. With consumers more dependent than ever on fixed and mobile broadband networks for work, healthcare services, education, and social activities, the Commission remains committed to ensuring consumers across the nation have meaningful access to broadband. With the support of the Commission's universal service fund, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which included the largest ever federal investment in broadband, as well as other federal and state broadband deployment programs, more funding than ever is available to build the necessary infrastructure to bring much-needed broadband services to unserved and underserved areas in the United States. Key to these broadband projects are the utility poles that support the wires and the wireless equipment that carry broadband to American homes and businesses.

2. Over the last several years, the Commission has taken significant steps in setting the "rules for the road" for the discussions between utilities and telecommunications companies about the timing and cost of attaching broadband equipment to utility poles, with the backstop of a robust complaint process when parties cannot agree on the rates, terms, and conditions for pole attachments. (Note that section 224(c) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the Act), exempts from Commission jurisdiction those pole attachments in states that have elected to regulate pole attachments themselves. To date, 23 states and the District of Columbia have opted out of Commission regulation of pole attachments in their jurisdictions. The Commission's pole attachment rules currently only apply to cable operators and providers of telecommunications services and therefore do not apply to broadband-only internet service providers. We recently proposed to reclassify broadband internet access service as a telecommunications service,

which would, if completed, apply section 224 and the Commission's pole attachment rules to broadband-only internet service providers.) In this item, we take additional steps to speed broadband deployment by making the pole attachment process faster, more transparent, and more cost effective. Specifically, we adopt rules (1) establishing a new process for the Commission's review and assessment of pole attachment disputes that impede or delay broadband deployment in order to expedite resolution of such disputes, and (2) providing communications providers with information about the status of the utility poles they plan to use as they map out their broadband builds. Additionally, as a follow-on to the pole replacement clarification issued in the *2021 Pole Replacement Declaratory Ruling*, in the Declaratory Ruling below we provide further clarification regarding cost causation when a pole must be replaced for any reason other than lacking capacity to support a new attachment. Specifically, we clarify that a "red tagged" pole is one that the utility has identified as needing replacement for any reason other than the pole's lack of capacity, and we provide additional examples of when a pole replacement is not "necessitated solely" as a result of a third party's attachment or modification request—*i.e.*, when a pole already requires replacement at the time the new attacher makes a request. We also clarify the obligation to share easement information and the applicable timelines for the processing of attachment requests for 3,000 or more poles. Finally, we seek comment in the FNPRM on ways to further facilitate the processing of pole attachment applications and make-ready to enable faster broadband deployment.

II. Background

3. In 1996, as part of its implementation of the pole attachment requirements located in sections 224(h) and 224(i) of the Act, the Commission determined that when a modification, such as a pole replacement, is undertaken for the benefit of a particular party, then under cost causation principles, the benefiting party must assume the cost of the modification. (Section 224(h) states that "[w]henver the owner of a pole, duct, conduit, or right-of-way intends to modify or alter such pole, duct, conduit, or right-of-way, the owner shall provide written notification of such action to any entity that has obtained an attachment to such conduit or right-of-way so that such entity may have a reasonable opportunity to add to or modify its

existing attachment. Any entity that adds to or modifies its existing attachment after receiving such notification shall bear a proportionate share of the costs incurred by the owner in making such pole, duct, conduit, or right-of-way accessible." Section 224(i) states that "[a]n entity that obtains an attachment to a pole, conduit, or right-of-way shall not be required to bear any of the costs of rearranging or replacing its attachment, if such rearrangement or replacement is required as a result of an additional attachment or the modification of an existing attachment sought by any other entity (including the owner of such pole, duct, conduit, or right-of-way).") The Commission also found that when a utility decides to modify a pole for its own benefit, and no other attachers derive a benefit from the modification, the utility must bear the full cost of the new pole. The Commission further adopted a cost sharing principle for when an existing attacher uses a modification by another party as an opportunity to add to or modify its own attachments and applied this principle to utilities and other attachers seeking to use modifications as an opportunity to bring their own facilities into compliance with safety or other requirements. In the *2018 Wireline Infrastructure Order*, the Commission reiterated that application of the cost sharing principle.

4. On July 16, 2020, NCTA—the Internet & Television Association (NCTA) filed a Petition asking the Commission to clarify its rules in the context of pole replacements. Specifically, NCTA asked the Commission to declare that: (1) utilities must share in the cost of pole replacements in unserved areas pursuant to section 224 of the Act, section 1.1408(b) of the Commission's rules, and Commission precedent; (2) pole attachment complaints arising in unserved areas should be prioritized through placement on the Accelerated Docket under § 1.736 of the Commission's rules; and (3) § 1.1407(b) of the Commission's rules authorizes the Commission to order a utility to complete a pole replacement within a specified time frame or designate an authorized contractor to do so. NCTA argued that without Commission action, the costs and operational challenges associated with pole replacements will inhibit attachers from deploying broadband services to Americans in unserved areas.

5. In the *2021 Pole Replacement Declaratory Ruling*, although the Wireline Competition Bureau declined to act on NCTA's Petition, finding that "it is more appropriate to address

questions concerning the allocation of pole replacement costs within the context of a rulemaking, which provides the Commission with greater flexibility to tailor regulatory solutions," it observed that the record developed in response to the NCTA Petition revealed inconsistent practices by utilities with regard to cost responsibility for pole replacements. Accordingly, the Bureau clarified that, pursuant to § 1.1408(b) of the Commission's rules and prior precedent, "utilities may not require requesting attachers to pay the entire cost of pole replacements that are not solely caused by the new attacher and, thus, may not avoid responsibility for pole replacement costs by postponing replacements until new attachment requests are submitted." The Commission subsequently affirmed the Bureau's clarifications.

6. Last year, the Commission issued a *Second Further Notice* (87 FR 25181; Apr. 28, 2022) in this proceeding seeking comment on the universe of situations where the requesting attacher should not be required to pay for the full cost of a pole replacement and the proper allocation of costs among utilities and attachers in those situations. (To the extent that this Report and Order does not expressly address a topic that was subject to comment in the *Second Further Notice*, that issue remains pending.) Specifically, the Commission sought comment on the applicability of cost causation and cost allocation principles in the context of pole replacements—*e.g.*, when is a pole replacement not caused (necessitated solely) by a new attachment request, and when and how parties must share in the costs of a pole replacement. The Commission also sought comment on the extent to which utilities directly benefit from pole replacements, including a utility's responsibility for the costs of pole upgrades and modifications unrelated to new attachments and the effect of early pole retirements on pole replacement cost causation and cost allocation calculations. The *Second Further Notice* also sought comment on whether the Commission should require utilities to share information with potential attachers concerning the condition and replacement status of their poles and other measures that may help avoid or expedite the resolution of disputes between the parties, including whether to expand use of the Commission's Accelerated Docket for pole attachment complaints and the specific criteria that Commission staff should use in deciding whether to place a pole complaint on the Accelerated Docket.

III. Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

7. We recognize that Congress has undertaken a number of initiatives allocating funding to further the deployment of broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the United States. In connection with this funding, broadband providers will have to deploy extensive facilities. This, in turn will require that they file significant numbers of applications seeking to attach these facilities to large numbers of poles. To that end, we seek comment on ways to further facilitate the approval process for pole attachment applications and make-ready to enable speedier broadband deployment. In seeking comment on these areas, we emphasize that even when there is not a specific Commission rule or policy that governs a particular situation, it is our expectation that parties negotiate in good faith to resolve issues that may arise.

8. *Large Orders.* We tentatively conclude that we should adopt a defined make-ready timeline for orders that exceed 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in a state in order to facilitate the processing of pole attachment applications that are submitted in large numbers. We seek comment on this tentative conclusion. Our current make-ready rule requires make-ready in the communications space to be completed within 30 days after the utility sends a notification to all existing attachers on a pole. (The rule provides 90 days from attachments above the communications space.) The 30-day timeframe applies for communications space make-ready requests up to the lesser of 300 poles or 0.5 percent of the utility's poles in a state. This make-ready timeframe is extended 45 extra days for requests up to the lesser of 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in a state. For requests exceeding 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in the state, the Commission's rules require that a utility shall negotiate the timing of the make-ready in good faith. (As we clarify in the Declaratory Ruling accompanying this FNPRM, the first 3,000 poles of these large orders are subject to the timeline set forth in § 1.1411(g)(3).) We tentatively conclude that utilities should have an additional 90 days for make-ready for requests exceeding 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in a state and seek comment on this tentative conclusion.

9. NCTA asserts that our rules do not at present sufficiently address the needs of attachers with these larger requests in the latter category. For example, NCTA

asserts that its members have faced situations where the utilities have imposed limits on (1) the number of poles that may be included in any one application, and (2) the number of applications an attacher may submit at a time. NCTA states that these limitations "create problematic delays and jeopardize operators' ability to meet broadband build-out commitments." At the same time, USTelecom notes the difficulties presented by these very large orders, noting that "make-ready requests involving more than 3,000 poles require flexibility that make-ready timelines cannot provide, given the many outside factors that impact the time required for make-ready for such large orders, including permitting delays, workforce shortages and staffing issues, and the coordination required among all the attachers to the poles." Given these factors, would 90 additional days over the timeline set forth in § 1.411(e) be sufficient for processing these larger orders? Would some other amount of time be reasonable in all circumstances, or should the Commission create additional make-ready timeline tiers in its rules to differentiate between attachment applications that could range from requesting access to thousands of poles to tens or even hundreds of thousands of poles? If the Commission were to adopt additional make-ready timeline tiers, what would be an appropriate cut off number of poles for each tier? For instance, should the Commission add an additional number of days for application processing per 3,000 poles? Does the ability to deviate from the timelines specified in § 1.1411 provide utilities with enough flexibility such that imposing a 90 additional day limit would be reasonable?

10. We also seek comment on NCTA's proposal that the Commission revise its rules to prohibit utilities from limiting "the size of an application or the number of poles included in an application so as to avoid the timelines." How prevalent are situations of the type described by NCTA? Are the reasons underlying utilities' imposition of such limitations as laid out by USTelecom valid, and do other reasons exist for these limitations? Would prohibiting utilities from imposing such limitations in fact speed up the attachment process, or would the same delays still exist for other reasons (*e.g.*, lack of qualified workers, shortages in materials, etc.) or even, as USTelecom alleges, "ultimately slow—rather than—accelerate deployment"? Specifically, NCTA proposes adding additional time to the existing timelines for these

"larger" orders, for which our rules require that utilities negotiate the timing in good faith. Would NCTA's proposed new timing requirements for larger orders facilitate the pole attachment process for such orders? Utilities have raised multiple concerns with such requirements. For example, they assert that compliance with expanded timelines may not be possible "if many permit applications by multiple attachers are submitted at approximately the same time, or if the contractor's workload is already heavy." They also assert that given constraints on workforce availability, utilities would be forced to "choose between providing safe, reliable and affordable power to electric customers (which is mandated by the states), and performing requested pole replacements in an unreasonable and likely unattainable amount of time." Are these concerns valid? Are there any other reasons why NCTA's proposed new timing requirements for larger orders would not work? What are the respective costs and benefits of such potential requirements? What other steps could we take to facilitate the pole attachment process for larger orders?

11. *Self-Help and Use of Contractors.* Should the Commission consider modifying its self-help rules to enable prospective attachers to access poles more quickly? NCTA also asserts that it has faced issues with utilities failing to process attachment applications in a timely manner. NCTA therefore proposes that utilities notify attachers in advance of survey and make-ready deadlines if the utility will be unable to complete a portion of the process. For instance, NCTA proposes that the utility notify an attacher 15 days after receiving a complete application that it cannot conduct the survey within the required 45-day period so that the attacher can elect self-help for the survey sooner. NCTA also proposes making self-help available for the estimate process, which is not contemplated under current Commission rules. We seek comment on NCTA's proposal. (We decline NCTA's request to adopt rules in the Fourth Report and Order regarding self-help and the use of contractors. We find that these issues would be better addressed after a more comprehensive record is developed.) How prevalent is the issue cited by NCTA? Can utilities feasibly be required to inform attachers within 15 business days of receiving a completed application that they will be unable to conduct a survey, estimate, or make-ready within the required time period? Do sufficient contractors exist that meet the minimum qualification

requirements set forth in our rules such that adoption of NCTA's proposal would have the desired effect of speeding broadband deployment? What are the respective costs and benefits of adopting NCTA's proposal? Are there other ways to assist utilities in processing the larger number of applications they will likely receive in the coming months and years based on the funding initiatives in place for accelerating broadband deployment to unserved and underserved areas?

12. We also seek comment on the impact of contractor availability when attachers seek to use their own contractors when conducting self-help or one-touch make-ready for surveys and make-ready work. Specifically, do we need to amend the Commission's rules to make it easier for attachers to use their own contractors to do self-help and one-touch make-ready surveys and make-ready work when there are no contractors available from a utility list? Utility commenters point out the labor constraints in the contractor workforce; given such constraints, do our current rules provide adequate relief to attachers to timely identify and use qualified contractors to do self-help and one-touch make-ready work? If not, what can the Commission do to change this dynamic?

13. Pursuant to our rules, an attacher can do its own work when (1) completing surveys and make-ready work when the utility misses the deadlines for these activities, or (2) electing to use the one-touch make-ready process. (Note that there are no attacher self-help remedies for pole replacements.) When conducting self-help or one-touch make-ready work, the attacher must use a utility-approved contractor. For self-help surveys and make-ready work that is complex or is above the communications space on a pole, our rules require that a utility make available and keep up to date a reasonably sufficient list of contractors that it authorizes to perform such work. (The term "complex make-ready" means transfers and work within the communications space on a pole that would be reasonably likely to cause a service outage(s) or facility damage, including work such as splicing of any communication attachment or relocation of existing wireless attachments. Any and all wireless activities, including those involving mobile, fixed, and point-to-point wireless communications and wireless internet service providers, are to be considered complex.) Attachers can request to add contractors to the utility's list—provided the contractor meets the minimum qualifications in the

Commission's rules—and the utility cannot unreasonably withhold its consent. Further, a utility may, but is not required to, keep up-to-date a reasonably sufficient list of contractors it authorizes to perform surveys and simple make-ready. If a utility provides such a list, then the new attacher must choose a contractor from the list to perform the work. Again, attachers may request the addition to the list of any contractor that meets the minimum qualifications in the Commission's rules, and the utility cannot unreasonably withhold its consent. However, if the utility does not provide a list of approved contractors for surveys or simple make-ready work or no utility-approved contractor is available within a reasonable time period, then the new attacher may choose its own qualified contractor who meets the Commission's minimum requirements. Utilities retain the right to disqualify such contractor, but disqualification must be based on reasonable safety or reliability concerns related to the contractor's failure to meet any of the Commission's minimum qualifications or to meet the utility's publicly available and commercially reasonable safety or reliability standards. The utility must provide notice of this objection to the attacher and must identify at least one available qualified contractor that the attacher can use instead to perform simple surveys and make-ready work.

14. Given that our current rules allow for attachers to choose their own contractors for one-touch make-ready and for self-help when the utility fails to meet the Commission's deadlines (provided such contractors meet the minimum qualifications set forth in our rules), we seek comment on whether attachers are availing themselves of this option. Have attachers faced any obstacles from utilities when seeking to invoke this option? While a utility cannot be blamed for a lack of available contractors in an area due to workforce constraints, are utilities seeking to use their discretion set forth in the rules to disqualify otherwise-qualified contractors whom attachers may seek to bring in from outside of an area? We note that, at least for surveys and simple make-ready work, our current rules already require the utility to designate an available contractor if it properly exercises its discretion to disqualify one chosen by an attacher—is this not being done? If not, is it due to labor constraints for which the utility should not be held responsible? In the instance where no qualified contractors are

available for a project, how could the Commission help to solve that problem?

IV. Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

15. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980, as amended (RFA), the Commission has prepared this Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities by the policies and rules proposed in this *FNPRM*. The Commission requests written public comments on this IRFA. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed by the deadlines for comments provided on the first page of the *FNPRM*. The Commission will send a copy of the *FNPRM*, including this IRFA, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration (SBA). In addition, the *FNPRM* and IRFA (or summaries thereof) will be published in the **Federal Register**.

A. Need for, and Objectives of, the Proposed Rules

16. In order to continue the Commission's work combating illegal calls, this *FNPRM* proposes to impose several obligations on gateway providers. Specifically, the *FNPRM* proposes to require gateway providers to authenticate and employ robocall mitigation techniques on all SIP calls that they allow into the United States from abroad that display a U.S. number in the caller ID field. The *FNPRM* also proposes that gateway providers should engage in robocall mitigation by (1) responding to all traceback requests from the Commission, law enforcement, and the industry traceback consortium within 24 hours; (2) complying with mandatory call blocking requirements; (3) complying with enhanced know-your-customer obligations; (4) complying with a general duty to mitigate illegal robocalls; and (5) filing a certification in the Robocall Mitigation Database. The Commission also proposes one blocking requirement for intermediate and terminating providers immediately downstream from the gateway provider, which would require those providers to block all traffic from a gateway provider that fails to block or effectively mitigate illegal traffic when notified of such traffic by the Commission.

B. Legal Basis

17. The *FNPRM* proposes to find authority largely under those provisions through which it has previously adopted rules to stem the tide of robocalls in its *Call Blocking and Call*

Authentication Orders. Specifically, the FNPRM proposes to find authority under sections 201(a) and (b), 202(a), 251(e), the Truth in Caller ID Act, the TRACED Act and, where appropriate, ancillary authority. The FNPRM also proposes to conclude that, to the extent any of the rules we seek to adopt have an effect on foreign service providers, that effect is only indirect and therefore consistent with the Commission's authority. The FNPRM solicits comment on these proposals.

C. Description and Estimate of the Number of Small Entities to Which the Proposed Rules Will Apply

18. The RFA directs agencies to provide a description of, and where feasible, an estimate of the number of small entities that may be affected by the proposed rules, if adopted. The RFA generally defines the term "small entity" as having the same meaning as the terms "small business," "small organization," and "small governmental jurisdiction." In addition, the term "small business" has the same meaning as the term "small business concern" under the Small Business Act. (Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 601(3), the statutory definition of a small business applies "unless an agency, after consultation with the Office of Advocacy of the Small Business Administration and after opportunity for public comment, establishes one or more definitions of such term which are appropriate to the activities of the agency and publishes such definition(s) in the **Federal Register.**") A "small business concern" is one which: (1) is independently owned and operated; (2) is not dominant in its field of operation; and (3) satisfies any additional criteria established by the SBA.

19. *Small Businesses, Small Organizations, Small Governmental Jurisdictions.* Our actions, over time, may affect small entities that are not easily categorized at present. We therefore describe, at the outset, three broad groups of small entities that could be directly affected herein. First, while there are industry specific size standards for small businesses that are used in the regulatory flexibility analysis, according to data from the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Office of Advocacy, in general a small business is an independent business having fewer than 500 employees. These types of small businesses represent 99.9% of all businesses in the United States, which translates to 33.2 million businesses.

20. Next, the type of small entity described as a "small organization" is generally "any not-for-profit enterprise

which is independently owned and operated and is not dominant in its field." The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) uses a revenue benchmark of \$50,000 or less to delineate its annual electronic filing requirements for small exempt organizations. (The IRS benchmark is similar to the population of less than 50,000 benchmark in 5 U.S.C. 601(5) that is used to define a small governmental jurisdiction. Therefore, the IRS benchmark has been used to estimate the number of small organizations in this small entity description. We note that the IRS data does not provide information on whether a small exempt organization is independently owned and operated or dominant in its field.) Nationwide, for tax year 2020, there were approximately 447,689 small exempt organizations in the U.S. reporting revenues of \$50,000 or less according to the registration and tax data for exempt organizations available from the IRS. (The IRS Exempt Organization Business Master File (E.O. BMF) Extract provides information on all registered tax-exempt/non-profit organizations. The data utilized for purposes of this description was extracted from the IRS E.O. BMF data for businesses for the tax year 2020 with revenue less than or equal to \$50,000 for Region 1—Northeast Area (58,577), Region 2—Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes Areas (175,272), and Region 3—Gulf Coast and Pacific Coast Areas (213,840) that includes the continental U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii. This data does not include information for Puerto Rico.)

21. Finally, the small entity described as a "small governmental jurisdiction" is defined generally as "governments of cities, counties, towns, townships, villages, school districts, or special districts, with a population of less than fifty thousand." U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2017 Census of Governments indicate there were 90,075 local governmental jurisdictions consisting of general purpose governments and special purpose governments in the United States. (The Census of Governments survey is conducted every five (5) years compiling data for years ending with "2" and "7".) (Local governmental jurisdictions are made up of general purpose governments (county, municipal and town or township) and special purpose governments (special districts and independent school districts).) Of this number, there were 36,931 general purpose governments (county, (there were 2,105 county governments with populations less than 50,000. This category does not include subcounty (municipal and township)

governments) municipal, and town or township (there were 18,729 municipal and 16,097 town and township governments with populations less than 50,000)) with populations of less than 50,000 and 12,040 special purpose governments— independent school districts (there were 12,040 independent school districts with enrollment populations less than 50,000) with enrollment populations of less than 50,000. (While the special purpose governments category also includes local special district governments, the 2017 Census of Governments data does not provide data aggregated based on population size for the special purpose governments category. Therefore, only data from independent school districts is included in the special purpose governments category.) Accordingly, based on the 2017 U.S. Census of Governments data, we estimate that at least 48,971 entities fall into the category of "small governmental jurisdictions." (This total is derived from the sum of the number of general purpose governments (county, municipal and town or township) with populations of less than 50,000 (36,931) and the number of special purpose governments— independent school districts with enrollment populations of less than 50,000 (12,040), from the 2017 Census of Governments—Organizations tbls. 5, 6 & 10.)

1. Internet Access Service Providers

22. *Wired Broadband Internet Access Service Providers (Wired ISPs).* (Formerly included in the scope of the Internet Service Providers (Broadband), Wired Telecommunications Carriers and All Other Telecommunications small entity industry descriptions.) Providers of wired broadband internet access service include various types of providers except dial-up internet access providers. Wireline service that terminates at an end user location or mobile device and enables the end user to receive information from and/or send information to the internet at information transfer rates exceeding 200 kilobits per second (kbps) in at least one direction is classified as a broadband connection under the Commission's rules. Wired broadband internet services fall in the Wired Telecommunications Carriers industry. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more

precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.)

23. Additionally, according to Commission data on internet access services as of June 30, 2019, nationwide there were approximately 2,747 providers of connections over 200 kbps in at least one direction using various wireline technologies. (The technologies used by providers include aDSL, sDSL, Other Wireline, Cable Modem and FTTP). Other wireline includes: all copper-wire based technologies other than xDSL (such as Ethernet over copper, T-1/DS-1 and T3/DS-1) as well as power line technologies which are included in this category to maintain the confidentiality of the providers.) The Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for providers of these services, therefore, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of providers that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard. However, in light of the general data on fixed technology service providers in the Commission's 2022 *Communications Marketplace Report*, we believe that the majority of wireline internet access service providers can be considered small entities.

24. Internet Service Providers (Non-Broadband). Internet access service providers using client-supplied telecommunications connections (e.g., dial-up ISPs) as well as VoIP service providers using client-supplied telecommunications connections fall in the industry classification of All Other Telecommunications. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies firms with annual receipts of \$35 million or less as small. For this industry, U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 1,079 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of those firms, 1,039 had revenue of less than \$25 million. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard. We also note that according to the U.S. Census Bureau glossary, the terms receipts and revenues are used interchangeably.) Consequently, under the SBA size standard a majority of firms in this industry can be considered small.

2. Wireline Providers

25. *Wired Telecommunications Carriers*. The U.S. Census Bureau defines this industry as establishments primarily engaged in operating and/or providing access to transmission facilities and infrastructure that they own and/or lease for the transmission of voice, data, text, sound, and video using wired communications networks.

Transmission facilities may be based on a single technology or a combination of technologies. Establishments in this industry use the wired telecommunications network facilities that they operate to provide a variety of services, such as wired telephony services, including VoIP services, wired (cable) audio and video programming distribution, and wired broadband internet services. By exception, establishments providing satellite television distribution services using facilities and infrastructure that they operate are included in this industry. Wired Telecommunications Carriers are also referred to as wireline carriers or fixed local service providers. (Fixed Local Service Providers include the following types of providers: Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (ILECs), Competitive Access Providers (CAPs) and Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (CLECs), Cable/Coax CLECs, Interconnected VOIP Providers, Non-Interconnected VOIP Providers, Shared-Tenant Service Providers, Audio Bridge Service Providers, and Other Local Service Providers. Local Resellers fall into another U.S. Census Bureau industry group and therefore data for these providers is not included in this industry.)

26. The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 4,590 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of fixed local services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 4,146 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

27. *Local Exchange Carriers (LECs)*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to local exchange services. Providers of these services include both incumbent and competitive local exchange service providers. Wired Telecommunications Carriers is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard. Wired Telecommunications Carriers are

also referred to as wireline carriers or fixed local service providers. (Fixed Local Exchange Service Providers include the following types of providers: Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (ILECs), Competitive Access Providers (CAPs) and Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (CLECs), Cable/Coax CLECs, Interconnected VOIP Providers, Non-Interconnected VOIP Providers, Shared Tenant Service Providers, Audio Bridge Service Providers, Local Resellers, and Other Local Service Providers.) The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 4,590 providers that reported they were fixed local exchange service providers. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 4,146 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

28. *Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (Incumbent LECs)*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA have developed a small business size standard specifically for incumbent local exchange carriers. Wired Telecommunications Carriers is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard. The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 1,212 providers that reported they were incumbent local exchange service providers. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 916 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the

SBA's small business size standard, the Commission estimates that the majority of incumbent local exchange carriers can be considered small entities.

29. *Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (LECs)*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to local exchange services. Providers of these services include several types of competitive local exchange service providers. (Competitive Local Exchange Service Providers include the following types of providers: Competitive Access Providers (CAPs) and Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (CLECs), Cable/Coax CLECs, Interconnected VOIP Providers, Non-Interconnected VOIP Providers, Shared Tenant Service Providers, Audio Bridge Service Providers, Local Resellers, and Other Local Service Providers.) Wired Telecommunications Carriers is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard. The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 3,378 providers that reported they were competitive local exchange service providers. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 3,230 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

30. *Interexchange Carriers (IXCs)*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for Interexchange Carriers. Wired Telecommunications Carriers is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard. The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission

data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 127 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of interexchange services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 109 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, the Commission estimates that the majority of providers in this industry can be considered small entities.

31. *Operator Service Providers (OSPs)*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for operator service providers. The closest applicable industry with an SBA small business size standard is Wired Telecommunications Carriers. The SBA small business size standard classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 20 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of operator services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that all 20 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, all of these providers can be considered small entities.

32. *Other Toll Carriers*. Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a definition for small businesses specifically applicable to Other Toll Carriers. This category includes toll carriers that do not fall within the categories of interexchange carriers, operator service providers, prepaid calling card providers, satellite service carriers, or toll resellers. Wired Telecommunications Carriers is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard. The SBA small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers classifies firms having 1,500 or fewer employees as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 3,054 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of this number, 2,964 firms operated with fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.)

Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 90 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of other toll services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 87 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

3. Wireless Providers—Fixed and Mobile

33. The broadband internet access service provider category covered by these new rules may cover multiple wireless firms and categories of regulated wireless services. (This includes, among others, the approximately 800 members of WISPA, including those entities who provide fixed wireless broadband service using unlicensed spectrum. We also consider the impact to these entities for the purposes of this FRFA, by including them under the "Wireless Providers—Fixed and Mobile" category.) Thus, to the extent the wireless services listed below are used by wireless firms for broadband internet access service, the actions may have an impact on those small businesses as set forth above and further below. In addition, for those services subject to auctions, we note that, as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that claim to qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Also, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments and transfers or reportable eligibility events, unjust enrichment issues are implicated.

34. *Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite)*. This industry comprises establishments engaged in operating and maintaining switching and transmission facilities to provide communications via the airwaves. Establishments in this industry have spectrum licenses and provide services using that spectrum, such as cellular services, paging services, wireless internet access, and wireless video services. The SBA size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of that number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.)

Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 594 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of wireless services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 511 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

35. *Wireless Communications Services.* Wireless Communications Services (WCS) can be used for a variety of fixed, mobile, radiolocation, and digital audio broadcasting satellite services. Wireless spectrum is made available and licensed for the provision of wireless communications services in several frequency bands subject to Part 27 of the Commission's rules. Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except Satellite*) is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard applicable to these services. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

36. The Commission's small business size standards with respect to WCS involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses for the various frequency bands included in WCS. When bidding credits are adopted for the auction of licenses in WCS frequency bands, such credits may be available to several types of small businesses based average gross revenues (small, very small and entrepreneur) pursuant to the competitive bidding rules adopted in conjunction with the requirements for the auction and/or as identified in the designated entities section in Part 27 of the Commission's rules for the specific WCS frequency bands. (The "Designated entities" sections in subparts D–Q each contain the small business size standards adopted for the auction of the frequency band covered by that subpart.)

37. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an

auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

38. *1670–1675 MHz Services.* These wireless communications services can be used for fixed and mobile uses, except aeronautical mobile. Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except Satellite*) is the closest industry with an SBA small business size standard applicable to these services. The SBA size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

39. According to Commission data as of November 2021, there were three active licenses in this service. (Based on an FCC Universal Licensing System search on November 8, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, "Match only the following radio service(s)", Radio Service = BC; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to 1670–1675 MHz Services involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses for these services. For licenses in the 1670–1675 MHz service band, a "small business" is defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years, and a "very small business" is defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has had average annual gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years. The 1670–1675 MHz service band

auction's winning bidder did not claim small business status.

40. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

41. *Wireless Telephony.* Wireless telephony includes cellular, personal communications services, and specialized mobile radio telephony carriers. The closest applicable industry with an SBA small business size standard is Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except Satellite*). The size standard for this industry under SBA rules is that a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. For this industry, U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 331 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of cellular, personal communications services, and specialized mobile radio services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that 255 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, most of these providers can be considered small entities.

42. *Broadband Personal Communications Service.* The broadband personal communications services (PCS) spectrum encompasses services in the 1850–1910 and 1930–1990 MHz bands. The closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to these services is Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except Satellite*). The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for

2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

43. Based on Commission data as of November 2021, there were approximately 5,060 active licenses in the Broadband PCS service. (Based on a FCC Universal Licensing System search on November 16, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, "Match only the following radio service(s)", Radio Service = CW; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to Broadband PCS involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses for these services. In auctions for these licenses, the Commission defined "small business" as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years, and a "very small business" as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has had average annual gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years. Winning bidders claiming small business credits won Broadband PCS licenses in C, D, E, and F Blocks.

44. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

45. *Specialized Mobile Radio Licenses.* Special Mobile Radio (SMR) licenses allow licensees to provide land mobile communications services (other

than radiolocation services) in the 800 MHz and 900 MHz spectrum bands on a commercial basis including but not limited to services used for voice and data communications, paging, and facsimile services, to individuals, Federal Government entities, and other entities licensed under Part 90 of the Commission's rules. Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite) is the closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to these services. The SBA size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. For this industry, U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 95 providers that reported they were of SMR (dispatch) providers. Of this number, the Commission estimates that all 95 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, these 119 SMR licensees can be considered small entities. (We note that there were also SMR providers reporting in the "Cellular/PCS/SMR" classification, therefore there are maybe additional SMR providers that have not been accounted for in the SMR (dispatch) classification.)

46. Based on Commission data as of December 2021, there were 3,924 active SMR licenses. (Based on a FCC Universal Licensing System search on December 15, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, "Match radio services within this group", Radio Service = SMR; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) However, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing SMR services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard. Nevertheless, for purposes of this analysis the Commission estimates that the majority of SMR licensees can be considered small entities using the SBA's small business size standard.

47. *Lower 700 MHz Band Licenses.* The lower 700 MHz band encompasses

spectrum in the 698–746 MHz frequency bands. Permissible operations in these bands include flexible fixed, mobile, and broadcast uses, including mobile and other digital new broadcast operation; fixed and mobile wireless commercial services (including FDD- and TDD-based services); as well as fixed and mobile wireless uses for private, internal radio needs, two-way interactive, cellular, and mobile television broadcasting services. Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite) is the closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to licenses providing services in these bands. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

48. According to Commission data as of December 2021, there were approximately 2,824 active Lower 700 MHz Band licenses. (Based on a FCC Universal Licensing System search on December 14, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, "Match only the following radio service(s)", Radio Service = WY, WZ; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to Lower 700 MHz Band licensees involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses. For auctions of Lower 700 MHz Band licenses the Commission adopted criteria for three groups of small businesses. A very small business was defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average annual gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years, a small business was defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years, and an entrepreneur was defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$3 million for the preceding

three years. In auctions for Lower 700 MHz Band licenses seventy-two winning bidders claiming a small business classification won 329 licenses, twenty-six winning bidders claiming a small business classification won 214 licenses, and three winning bidders claiming a small business classification won all five auctioned licenses.

49. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

50. *Upper 700 MHz Band Licenses.* The upper 700 MHz band encompasses spectrum in the 746–806 MHz bands. Upper 700 MHz D Block licenses are nationwide licenses associated with the 758–763 MHz and 788–793 MHz bands. Permissible operations in these bands include flexible fixed, mobile, and broadcast uses, including mobile and other digital new broadcast operation; fixed and mobile wireless commercial services (including FDD- and TDD-based services); as well as fixed and mobile wireless uses for private, internal radio needs, two-way interactive, cellular, and mobile television broadcasting services. (We note that in Auction 73, Upper 700 MHz Band C and D Blocks as well as Lower 700 MHz Band A, B, and E Blocks were auctioned.) Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except* Satellite) is the closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to licenses providing services in these bands. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of that number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus, under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of

licensees in this industry can be considered small.

51. According to Commission data as of December 2021, there were approximately 152 active Upper 700 MHz Band licenses. (Based on a FCC Universal Licensing System search on December 14, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, “Match only the following radio service(s)”, Radio Service = WP, WU; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to Upper 700 MHz Band licensees involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses. For the auction of these licenses, the Commission defined a “small business” as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years, and a “very small business” an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues that are not more than \$15 million for the preceding three years. Pursuant to these definitions, three winning bidders claiming very small business status won five of the twelve available licenses.

52. *Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service.* Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service is a wireless service in which licensees are authorized to offer and provide radio telecommunications service for hire to subscribers in aircraft. A licensee may provide any type of air-ground service (*i.e.*, voice telephony, broadband internet, data, etc.) to aircraft of any type, and serve any or all aviation markets (commercial, government, and general). A licensee must provide service to aircraft and may not provide ancillary land mobile or fixed services in the 800 MHz air-ground spectrum.

53. The closest industry with an SBA small business size standard applicable to these services is Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except* Satellite). The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus, under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of

licensees in this industry can be considered small.

54. Based on Commission data as of December 2021, there were approximately four licensees with 110 active licenses in the Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service. (Based on a FCC Universal Licensing System search on December 20, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, “Match only the following radio service(s)”, Radio Service = CG, CJ; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses. For purposes of auctions, the Commission defined “small business” as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years, and a “very small business” as an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has had average annual gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years. In the auction of Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service licenses in the 800 MHz band, neither of the two winning bidders claimed small business status.

55. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services therefore, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

56. *3650–3700 MHz Band.* Wireless broadband service licensing in the 3650–3700 MHz band provides for nationwide, non-exclusive licensing of terrestrial operations, utilizing contention-based technologies, in the 3650 MHz band (*i.e.*, 3650–3700 MHz). Licensees are permitted to provide services on a non-common carrier and/or on a common carrier basis. Wireless broadband services in the 3650–3700

MHz band fall in the Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except* Satellite) industry with an SBA small business size standard that classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

57. The Commission has not developed a small business size standard applicable to 3650–3700 MHz band licensees. Based on the licenses that have been granted, however, we estimate that the majority of licensees in this service are small internet Access Service Providers (ISPs). As of November 2021, Commission data shows that there were 902 active licenses in the 3650–3700 MHz band. (Based on an FCC Universal Licensing System search on November 19, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, “Match only the following radio service(s)”, Radio Service = NN; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) However, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA’s small business size standard.

58. *Fixed Microwave Services.* Fixed microwave services include common carrier, private-operational fixed, and broadcast auxiliary radio services. (Auxiliary Microwave Service is governed by part 74 of Title 47 of the Commission’s Rules. Available to licensees of broadcast stations and to broadcast and cable network entities, broadcast auxiliary microwave stations are used for relaying broadcast television signals from the studio to the transmitter, or between two points such as a main studio and an auxiliary studio. The service also includes mobile TV pickups, which relay signals from a remote location back to the studio.) They also include the Upper Microwave Flexible Use Service (UMFUS), Millimeter Wave Service (70/80/90 GHz), Local Multipoint Distribution Service (LMDS), the Digital Electronic Message Service (DEMS), 24 GHz

Service, Multiple Address Systems (MAS), and Multichannel Video Distribution and Data Service (MVDDS), where in some bands licensees can choose between common carrier and non-common carrier status. Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except* Satellite) is the closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to these services. The SBA small size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of fixed microwave service licensees can be considered small.

59. The Commission’s small business size standards with respect to fixed microwave services involve eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses for the various frequency bands included in fixed microwave services. When bidding credits are adopted for the auction of licenses in fixed microwave services frequency bands, such credits may be available to several types of small businesses based average gross revenues (small, very small and entrepreneur) pursuant to the competitive bidding rules adopted in conjunction with the requirements for the auction and/or as identified in part 101 of the Commission’s rules for the specific fixed microwave services frequency bands.

60. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA’s small business size standard.

61. *Broadband Radio Service and Educational Broadband Service.* Broadband Radio Service systems, previously referred to as Multipoint

Distribution Service (MDS) and Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS) systems, and “wireless cable,” transmit video programming to subscribers and provide two-way high speed data operations using the microwave frequencies of the Broadband Radio Service (BRS) and Educational Broadband Service (EBS) (previously referred to as the Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS)). (The use of the term “wireless cable” does not imply that it constitutes cable television for statutory or regulatory purposes.) Wireless cable operators that use spectrum in the BRS often supplemented with leased channels from the EBS, provide a competitive alternative to wired cable and other multichannel video programming distributors. Wireless cable programming to subscribers resembles cable television, but instead of coaxial cable, wireless cable uses microwave channels. (Generally, a wireless cable system may be described as a microwave station transmitting on a combination of BRS and EBS channels to numerous receivers with antennas, such as single-family residences, apartment complexes, hotels, educational institutions, business entities and governmental offices. The range of the transmission depends upon the transmitter power, the type of receiving antenna and the existence of a line-of-sight path between the transmitter or signal booster and the receiving antenna.)

62. In light of the use of wireless frequencies by BRS and EBS services, the closest industry with a SBA small business size standard applicable to these services is Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (*except* Satellite). The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business as small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 2,893 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 2,837 firms employed fewer than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Thus under the SBA size standard, the Commission estimates that a majority of licensees in this industry can be considered small.

63. According to Commission data as of December 2021, there were approximately 5,869 active BRS and EBS licenses. (Based on an FCC Universal Licensing System search on December 10, 2021, search parameters: Service Group = All, “Match only the following radio service(s)”, Radio

Service = BR, ED; Authorization Type = All; Status = Active. We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) The Commission's small business size standards with respect to BRS involves eligibility for bidding credits and installment payments in the auction of licenses for these services. For the auction of BRS licenses, the Commission adopted criteria for three groups of small businesses. A very small business is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average annual gross revenues exceed \$3 million and did not exceed \$15 million for the preceding three years, a small business is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues exceed \$15 million and did not exceed \$40 million for the preceding three years, and an entrepreneur is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$3 million for the preceding three years. Of the ten winning bidders for BRS licenses, two bidders claiming the small business status won 4 licenses, one bidder claiming the very small business status won three licenses and two bidders claiming entrepreneur status won six licenses. One of the winning bidders claiming a small business status classification in the BRS license auction has an active license as of December 2021. (We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.) We note that the number of active licenses does not equate to the number of licensees. A licensee can have one or more licenses.

64. The Commission's small business size standards for EBS define a small business as an entity that, together with its affiliates, its controlling interests and the affiliates of its controlling interests, has average gross revenues that are not more than \$55 million for the preceding five (5) years, and a very small business is an entity that, together with its affiliates, its controlling interests and the affiliates of its controlling interests, has average gross revenues that are not more than \$20 million for the preceding five (5) years. In frequency bands where licenses were subject to auction, the Commission notes that as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Further, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the

context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated. Additionally, since the Commission does not collect data on the number of employees for licensees providing these services, at this time we are not able to estimate the number of licensees with active licenses that would qualify as small under the SBA's small business size standard.

4. Satellite Service Providers

65. *Satellite Telecommunications.* This industry comprises firms "primarily engaged in providing telecommunications services to other establishments in the telecommunications and broadcasting industries by forwarding and receiving communications signals via a system of satellites or reselling satellite telecommunications." Satellite telecommunications service providers include satellite and earth station operators. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies a business with \$35 million or less in annual receipts as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that 275 firms in this industry operated for the entire year. Of this number, 242 firms had revenue of less than \$25 million. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard. We also note that according to the U.S. Census Bureau glossary, the terms receipts and revenues are used interchangeably.) Additionally, based on Commission data in the 2022 Universal Service Monitoring Report, as of December 31, 2021, there were 65 providers that reported they were engaged in the provision of satellite telecommunications services. Of these providers, the Commission estimates that approximately 42 providers have 1,500 or fewer employees. Consequently, using the SBA's small business size standard, a little more than half of these providers can be considered small entities.

66. *All Other Telecommunications.* This industry is comprised of establishments primarily engaged in providing specialized telecommunications services, such as satellite tracking, communications telemetry, and radar station operation. This industry also includes establishments primarily engaged in providing satellite terminal stations and associated facilities connected with one or more terrestrial systems and capable of transmitting telecommunications to, and receiving telecommunications from, satellite systems. Providers of internet services (e.g. dial-up ISPs) or voice over

internet protocol (VoIP) services, via client-supplied telecommunications connections are also included in this industry. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies firms with annual receipts of \$35 million or less as small. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 show that there were 1,079 firms in this industry that operated for the entire year. Of those firms, 1,039 had revenue of less than \$25 million. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard. We also note that according to the U.S. Census Bureau glossary, the terms receipts and revenues are used interchangeably.) Based on this data, the Commission estimates that the majority of "All Other Telecommunications" firms can be considered small.

5. Cable Service Providers

67. Because section 706 of the Act requires us to monitor the deployment of broadband using any technology, we anticipate that some broadband service providers may not provide telephone service. Accordingly, we describe below other types of firms that may provide broadband services, including cable companies, MDS providers, and utilities, among others.

68. *Cable and Other Subscription Programming.* The U.S. Census Bureau defines this industry as establishments primarily engaged in operating studios and facilities for the broadcasting of programs on a subscription or fee basis. The broadcast programming is typically narrowcast in nature (e.g., limited format, such as news, sports, education, or youth-oriented). These establishments produce programming in their own facilities or acquire programming from external sources. The programming material is usually delivered to a third party, such as cable systems or direct-to-home satellite systems, for transmission to viewers. The SBA small business size standard for this industry classifies firms with annual receipts less than \$41.5 million as small. Based on U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017, 378 firms operated in this industry during that year. (The U.S. Census Bureau withheld publication of the number of firms that operated for the entire year to avoid disclosing data for individual companies (see Cell Notes for this category).) Of that number, 149 firms operated with revenue of less than \$25 million a year and 44 firms operated with revenue of \$25 million or more. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard. We note

that the U.S. Census Bureau withheld publication of the number of firms that operated with sales/value of shipments/revenue in all categories of revenue less than \$500,000 to avoid disclosing data for individual companies (see Cell Notes for the sales/value of shipments/revenue in these categories). Therefore, the number of firms with revenue that meet the SBA size standard would be higher than noted herein. We also note that according to the U.S. Census Bureau glossary, the terms receipts and revenues are used interchangeably.) Based on this data, the Commission estimates that a majority of firms in this industry are small.

69. *Cable Companies and Systems (Rate Regulation)*. The Commission has developed its own small business size standard for the purpose of cable rate regulation. Under the Commission's rules, a "small cable company" is one serving 400,000 or fewer subscribers nationwide. Based on industry data, there are about 420 cable companies in the U.S. Of these, only seven have more than 400,000 subscribers. In addition, under the Commission's rules, a "small system" is a cable system serving 15,000 or fewer subscribers. Based on industry data, there are about 4,139 cable systems (headends) in the U.S. Of these, about 639 have more than 15,000 subscribers. Accordingly, the Commission estimates that the majority of cable companies and cable systems are small.

70. *Cable System Operators (Telecom Act Standard)*. The Communications Act of 1934, as amended, contains a size standard for a "small cable operator," which is "a cable operator that, directly or through an affiliate, serves in the aggregate fewer than one percent of all subscribers in the United States and is not affiliated with any entity or entities whose gross annual revenues in the aggregate exceed \$250,000,000." For purposes of the Telecom Act Standard, the Commission determined that a cable system operator that serves fewer than 498,000 subscribers, either directly or through affiliates, will meet the definition of a small cable operator. (In the *2023 Subscriber Threshold Public Notice*, the Commission determined that there were approximately 49.8 million cable subscribers in the United States at that time using the most reliable source publicly available. This threshold will remain in effect until the Commission issues a superseding Public Notice.) Based on industry data, only six cable system operators have more than 498,000 subscribers. Accordingly, the Commission estimates that the majority of cable system operators are small under this size standard. We note however, that the Commission neither

requests nor collects information on whether cable system operators are affiliated with entities whose gross annual revenues exceed \$250 million. (The Commission does receive such information on a case-by-case basis if a cable operator appeals a local franchise authority's finding that the operator does not qualify as a small cable operator pursuant to § 76.901(e) of the Commission's rules.) Therefore, we are unable at this time to estimate with greater precision the number of cable system operators that would qualify as small cable operators under the definition in the Communications Act.

6. All Other Telecommunications

71. *Electric Power Generators, Transmitters, and Distributors*. The U.S. Census Bureau defines the utilities sector industry as comprised of "establishments, primarily engaged in generating, transmitting, and/or distributing electric power. Establishments in this industry group may perform one or more of the following activities: (1) operate generation facilities that produce electric energy; (2) operate transmission systems that convey the electricity from the generation facility to the distribution system; and (3) operate distribution systems that convey electric power received from the generation facility or the transmission system to the final consumer." This industry group is categorized based on fuel source and includes Hydroelectric Power Generation, Fossil Fuel Electric Power Generation, Nuclear Electric Power Generation, Solar Electric Power Generation, Wind Electric Power Generation, Geothermal Electric Power Generation, Biomass Electric Power Generation, Other Electric Power Generation, Electric Bulk Power Transmission and Control and Electric Power Distribution.

72. The SBA has established a small business size standard for each of these groups based on the number of employees which ranges from having fewer than 250 employees to having fewer than 1,000 employees. U.S. Census Bureau data for 2017 indicate that for the Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution industry there were 1,693 firms that operated in this industry for the entire year. Of this number, 1,552 firms had less than 250 employees. (The available U.S. Census Bureau data does not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that meet the SBA size standard.) Based on this data and the associated SBA size standards, the majority of firms in this industry can be considered small entities.

D. Description of Projected Reporting, Recordkeeping, and Other Compliance Requirements for Small Entities

73. In the *FNPRM*, we seek comment on ways to further facilitate the approval process for pole attachment applications and make-ready to enable quicker broadband deployment. Some of these proposals may impose new or additional reporting or recordkeeping and/or other compliance obligations on small entities. Specifically, we seek comment on a proposal that utilities should have an additional 90 days for make-ready for requests exceeding 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in a state. We also seek comment on whether NCTA's proposal to add additional time to the existing application timelines for larger orders and prohibit utilities from limiting the size of an application or the number of poles included in an application, to avoid these timelines, will facilitate the pole attachment process for such orders. Additionally, we seek comment on whether the Commission should create additional make-ready timeline tiers in its rules to differentiate between attachment applications that could range from requesting access to thousands of poles to tens or even hundreds of thousands of poles. We also consider whether to require that a utility notify an attacher 15 days after receiving a complete application that it cannot conduct the survey within the required 45-day period, making self-help available for the estimate process, which is not contemplated under current Commission rules. We also seek comment on whether attachers face any obstacles from utilities when seeking to invoke self-help options, which allows attachers to choose their own contractors for one-touch make-ready and for self-help when the utility fails to meet the Commission's deadlines. This information will help to inform whether potential rule changes are necessary. At this time, the Commission cannot quantify the cost of compliance for small entities with the approaches discussed in the *FNPRM*, or whether any compliance requirements will require small entities to hire professionals; however, the Commission requests information on the costs and benefits of the approaches discussed, such as the availability of qualified contractors and other workforce constraints that may impact the speed and cost of deployment for utilities and attachers.

E. Steps Taken To Minimize the Significant Economic Impact on Small Entities, and Significant Alternatives Considered

74. The RFA requires an agency to describe any significant, specifically small business, alternatives that it has considered in reaching its proposed approach, which may include the following four alternatives (among others): “(1) the establishment of differing compliance or reporting requirements or timetables that take into account the resources available to small entities; (2) the clarification, consolidation, or simplification of compliance and reporting requirements under the rule for such small entities; (3) the use of performance rather than design standards; and (4) an exemption from coverage of the rule, or any part thereof, for such small entities.”

75. The *FNPRM* seeks comment on whether the Commission should revise its rules to further facilitate the approval process for pole attachment applications and make-ready to enable quicker broadband deployment, including a tentative conclusion that utilities should have an additional 90 days for make-ready for requests exceeding 3,000 poles or 5 percent of the utility’s poles in a state. The Commission’s objective in requesting this information is to determine whether it can and should establish clear standards for when and how attachers and utilities must share the costs of a pole replacement precipitated by a new attachment request. Among the alternatives considered in the *FNPRM* is whether the Commission should allow additional time for the existing larger order timelines where our current rules require that utilities negotiate timing in good faith. We seek comment on whether requiring that the utility notify an attacher 15 days after receiving a complete application that it cannot conduct the survey within the required 45-day period would allow the attacher to elect self-help for the survey sooner. In the alternative, we inquire whether such expansion of time is reasonable for utilities if numerous permits are submitted around the same time or contractor workload is heavy. We also consider whether attachers are choosing to find their own contractors for one-touch make-ready and for self-help when utilities fail to meet the Commission’s deadlines. Similarly, we request information on whether or not utilities designate an available contractor if it properly exercises its discretion to disqualify one chosen by an attacher. We also seek comment on how the Commission can help resolve

situations where labor shortages may hinder utilities from meeting deadlines to respond to attachers. The Commission also seeks comment on and will consider the relative costs and benefits of any such revisions to its rules. Information submitted in response to these requests for comment will enable the Commission to evaluate the impact that revising its pole attachment rules would have on smaller entities.

F. Federal Rules That May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict With the Proposed Rules

76. None.

V. Procedural Matters

77. *Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis.* As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act, the Commission has prepared an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities of the policies and rules addressed in this *FNPRM*. Written public comments are requested on the IRFA. Comments must be filed by the deadlines for comments on the *FNPRM* indicated on the first page of this document and must have a separate and distinct heading designating them as responses to the IRFA. The Commission’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, will send a copy of this *FNPRM*, including the IRFA, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the SBA.

78. *Paperwork Reduction Act.* The *FNPRM* contains proposed new information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public and OMB to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104–13. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107–198, *see* 44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(4), we seek specific comment on how we might further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees.

79. *Ex Parte Presentations—Permit-But-Disclose.* The proceeding this *FNPRM* initiates shall be treated as a “permit-but-disclose” proceeding in accordance with the Commission’s *ex parte* rules. Persons making *ex parte* presentations must file a copy of any written presentation or a memorandum summarizing any oral presentation within two business days after the presentation (unless a different deadline applicable to the Sunshine period

applies). Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentation must (1) list all persons attending or otherwise participating in the meeting at which the *ex parte* presentation was made, and (2) summarize all data presented and arguments made during the presentation. If the presentation consisted in whole or in part of the presentation of data or arguments already reflected in the presenter’s written comments, memoranda or other filings in the proceeding, the presenter may provide citations to such data or arguments in his or her prior comments, memoranda, or other filings (specifying the relevant page and/or paragraph numbers where such data or arguments can be found) in lieu of summarizing them in the memorandum. Documents shown or given to Commission staff during *ex parte* meetings are deemed to be written *ex parte* presentations and must be filed consistent with § 1.1206(b) of the Commission’s rules. In proceedings governed by § 1.49(f) of the Commission’s rules or for which the Commission has made available a method of electronic filing, written *ex parte* presentations and memoranda summarizing oral *ex parte* presentations, and all attachments thereto, must be filed through the electronic comment filing system available for that proceeding, and must be filed in their native format (e.g., .doc, .xml, .ppt, searchable .pdf). Participants in this proceeding should familiarize themselves with the Commission’s *ex parte* rules.

VI. Ordering Clauses

80. Accordingly, *it is ordered*, pursuant to sections 4(i), 4(j), 201, 202, 217, 227, 227b, 251(e), 303(r), and 403 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. 154(i), 154(j), 201, 202, 217, 227, 227b, 251(e), 303(r), 403, that this Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking *is adopted*.

81. *It is further ordered* that the Commission’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, *shall send* a copy of this Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA), to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

List of Subjects in 47 CFR Part 1

Administrative practice and procedure.

Federal Communications Commission.

Katura Jackson,

Federal Register Liaison Officer.

Proposed Rules

The Federal Communications Commission proposes to amend part 1 of Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations as follows:

PART 1—PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

■ 1. The authority citation for part 1 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 47 U.S.C. chs. 2, 5, 9, 13; 28 U.S.C. 2461.

■ 2. Amend § 1.1411 by revising paragraph (g)(4) to read as follows:

§ 1.1411 Timeline for access to utility poles.

* * * * *

(g) * * *

(4) A utility may add 90 days to the make-ready periods described in paragraph (e) of this section to all requests for attachment larger than the lesser of 3000 poles or 5 percent of the utility's poles in a state.

* * * * *

[FR Doc. 2023-28763 Filed 1-10-24; 8:45 am]

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