



March 21, 2020

Ex Parte Notice

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20554

**RE: Advanced Methods to Target and Eliminate Unlawful Robocalls, CG Docket No. 17-59
Call Authentication Trust Anchor, WC Docket No. 17-97
Implementation of TRACED Act Section 6(a) — Knowledge of Customers by Entities
With Access to Numbering Resources, WC Docket No. 20-67**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On Friday, March 20, 2020, the undersigned and Brian Ford on behalf of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”)¹ spoke by telephone with Nirali Patel, Wireline Advisor to Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) Chairman Ajit Pai and Daniel Kahn, Associate Chief of the agency’s Wireline Competition Bureau. The parties discussed the Draft Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking² docketed in the above-captioned proceedings and on the agenda for the Commission’s consideration on March 31.

NTCA stated as an initial matter that even where voice traffic may be in IP format on their own networks, many RLECs today exchange traffic with upstream providers via media gateways that convert such traffic to TDM. Such is the case because many RLEC networks subtend tandem switches owned by other carriers that remain TDM, and these tandems therefore serve as small rural carriers’ gateway to and from the outside world. Small rural carriers have no control over upstream carriers’ relative technical capabilities or their inability to exchange voice traffic in IP.

As such, because STIR/SHAKEN depends upon the hand-off of calls in IP format between every network along the call path, the authenticated caller-ID information generated by the originating carrier will not transfer due to the presence of TDM switches in the networks of upstream carriers. While, the *Draft Report and Order* acknowledges this in some respects by stating that it limits “application of the rules we adopt today to only the IP portions of voice service providers’ networks—those portions that are able to initiate, maintain, and terminate

¹ NTCA represents approximately 850 independent, community-based telecommunications companies and cooperatives and more than 400 other firms that support or are themselves engaged in the provision of communications services in the most rural portions of America.

² Mandating STIR/SHAKEN and Proposing Additional Measures to Combat Illegal Spoofing, DRAFT Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket Nos. 17-97, 20-67 (“*Draft Report and Order*”).

SIP calls,”³ as an approach “consistent with the TRACED Act,”⁴ additional clarity is necessary. Specifically, NTCA proposed the following amendments to paragraph 35 of the *Draft Report and Order* (proposed additional language for paragraph 35 is provided in italics):

“a voice service provider that originates a call which it will exchange with another voice service provider or intermediate provider must use an authentication service and insert the Identity header in the SIP INVITE and thus authenticate the caller ID information in accordance with the STIR/SHAKEN authentication framework; it further must transmit that call with authentication to the next voice service provider or intermediate provider in the call path, to the extent technically feasible.”⁵ *Pursuant to this provision and in recognition of the TRACED Act’s direction to apply a STIR/SHAKEN mandate to only IP networks, the presence of TDM facilities in the call path (i.e., the next provider or any intermediate provider in the call path) that would therefore prevent the successful passing of call authentication information is specifically contemplated as falling within the “technically feasible” exemption from the STIR/SHAKEN mandate we adopt here.*

NTCA further expressed concern with the provisions of the *Draft Report and Order* that would require a carrier to authenticate a call that it originates and that “exclusively transits its own network.”⁶ NTCA stated its understanding that such authentication was not specifically contemplated in the STIR/SHAKEN standard and that in any case, doing so would add significant additional cost for some providers. NTCA suggested that such calls that exclusively transit a provider’s own network can be secured in a manner similar to that contemplated by STIR/SHAKEN but outside that framework and without the attendant significant costs as would come with the proposal contained in the *Draft Report and Order*. Given that the goal in the end is to convey trust in originating numbers to called parties, providers able to secure such calls in such a manner should be free to do so.

Thank you for your attention to this correspondence. Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission’s rules, a copy of this letter is being filed via ECFS.

Sincerely,
/s/ Michael Romano
Michael Romano
Senior Vice President – Industry Affairs and
Business Development
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

cc: Nirali Patel
Daniel Kahn

³ *Id.*, para 38.

⁴ *Id.*, citing Pallone-Thune Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence Act, Pub. L. No. 116-105, § 4(b)(1)(A), 133 Stat. 3274, 3277 (2019) (TRACED Act).

⁵ *Id.*, para 35.

⁶ *Id.*, para 33.