



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
TTY 202 / 418-2555
Fax-On-Demand 202 / 418-2830
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
<ftp.fcc.gov>

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News media contact:
Rosemary Kimball at (202) 418-0511
e-mail: rkimball@fcc.gov

UNIFORM SYSTEM FOR FILING INFORMAL COMPLAINTS PROPOSED *Change would promote efficiency and predictability for consumers and service providers*

Washington, DC -- The FCC has proposed new consumer-friendly rules for filing informal complaints. Under the proposed rules, complaints filed by consumers about any of the services regulated by the Commission would follow the same format and be handled in the same way by the FCC. Consumers, service providers and the Commission would benefit from the changes.

Specifically, the Commission has proposed adopting a consumer complaint mechanism patterned after the existing rules for informal complaints filed against common carriers in Section 208 of the Communications Act. The Section 208 informal complaint rules currently apply only to complaints against common carriers, including wireless carriers. They emphasize ease of filing by consumers, including those with disabilities, and voluntary, cooperative efforts by consumers and affected companies to resolve their differences informally.

The Commission has now proposed to extend this uniform, streamlined consumer complaint process to all services regulated by the Commission. These would include consumer complaints that raise issues within the Commission's jurisdiction filed against broadcast station licensees and cable franchise operators. The Commission's proposal also asked whether the existing rules should be changed to specify the type of documentation that should accompany informal complaints and to set a specific time frame within which a company must respond to a complaint.

The benefits to consumers, companies and the Commission under the proposed rules would be significant. Experience with processing common carrier-

related informal complaints under the Section 208 rules shows that the majority of these complaints are resolved by the carriers in a manner satisfactory to the complaining consumers.

The Section 208 informal complaint process has been a valuable tool in the Commission's enforcement arsenal in another important respect. The Commission relies on Section 208 informal complaints to monitor possible violations of the rules and orders and of other practices that may warrant Commission intervention to protect consumers. In the past year, the FCC has taken enforcement actions totaling over \$4.6 million against various common carriers for consumer-related violations of the Act or Commission rules and orders. Many of these forfeiture actions were based on staff review of Section 208 informal complaints filed by or on behalf of consumers. Under the proposed rules, the Commission would be able to capture similar information on all the services it regulates and take appropriate action.

Action by the Commission February 14, 2002 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 02-46.). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin, with Commissioners Abernathy, Copps and Martin issuing separate statements.

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CIB contact: Lynn Remly at (202) 418-2930.

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