

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2014 SESSION

CHAPTER 340

An Act to amend and reenact § 56-57 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Title 56 a chapter numbered 2.1, consisting of sections numbered 56-54.2 through 56-54.7, relating to the regulation of local exchange telephone companies; competitive telephone companies.

[H 774]

Approved March 27, 2014

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 56-57 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Title 56 a chapter numbered 2.1, consisting of sections numbered 56-54.2 through 56-54.7, as follows:

CHAPTER 2.1.

COMPETITIVE TELEPHONE COMPANIES.

§ 56-54.2. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Competitive local exchange telephone company" means (i) a competing telephone company, excluding a city, town, or county, that was granted a certificate on or after January 1, 1996, pursuant to § 56-265.4:4 or (ii) an incumbent local exchange telephone company to the extent such company is providing service outside of its incumbent territory.

"Competitive telephone company" means (i) an incumbent local exchange telephone company whose residential dialtone lines (a) were deemed competitive by the Commission throughout the company's incumbent service territory prior to January 1, 2014, or (b) are declared competitive by the Commission throughout its incumbent service territory on or after January 1, 2014, in a proceeding pursuant to § 56-235.5 or (ii) a competitive local exchange telephone company.

"Incumbent local exchange telephone company" means a public service corporation that was providing local exchange telephone service prior to January 1, 1996, or a successor entity to such a public service corporation.

"Incumbent territory" means the area in which an incumbent local exchange telephone company was providing local exchange telephone service prior to July 1, 2002, except as its incumbent certificate may have been amended by the Commission after that date pursuant to subdivision B 1 of § 56-265.4:4.

§ 56-54.3. Election to be regulated as a competitive telephone company.

Any telephone company meeting the definition of a competitive telephone company may elect to be regulated as a competitive telephone company pursuant to the provisions of this chapter by providing written notice to the Commission of such election. The election shall be effective 30 days after receipt of the notice by the Commission, unless (i) the Commission notifies the electing telephone company within that 30-day period that the telephone company does not meet the definition of a competitive telephone company and (ii) the Commission then commences a proceeding to challenge the election. In such a proceeding, interested parties shall be provided notice and an opportunity for a hearing. The Commission shall issue a final decision on any such proceeding challenging the election within 60 days of the electing telephone company's receipt of the Commission's notification of the commencement of the proceeding to challenge the election. A telephone company's election to be regulated as a competitive telephone company shall be deemed approved if the Commission fails to act within this 60-day period. A new entrant may elect to be regulated under this chapter when it applies for certification pursuant to § 56-265.4:4. Such an election will be effective upon its certification as a competitive local exchange carrier.

§ 56-54.4. Commission authority over competitive telephone companies.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Commission shall not have any jurisdiction and authority, including jurisdiction and authority over any obligation of a competitive telephone company to seek approval from the Commission, to regulate, supervise, or promulgate rules relating to the retail services, rates, and terms of service of a competitive telephone company, except as specifically enumerated in this chapter. The Commission shall have discretion as to the extent to which it will exercise the authority granted to it in this chapter. Nothing in this chapter grants, affects, modifies, or limits any rights, duties, obligations, or authority of any entity, including the Commission, (i) pursuant to the provisions of 47 U.S.C. § 251 and 47 U.S.C. § 252 or (ii) related to wholesale telephone services and issues, including the payment of switched network access rates or other intercarrier compensation, interconnection, porting, and numbering.

§ 56-54.5. Powers of the Commission.

A. The Commission may ensure competitive telephone companies provide reasonably adequate retail voice service, including rendering timely and accurate bills for service, by receiving customer

complaints and requiring the competitive telephone company to reasonably address bona fide complaints as promptly as is reasonably possible under the circumstances.

B. The Commission shall continue to have jurisdiction and authority to ensure the reasonably adequate provision by competitive telephone companies of the telecommunications portions of emergency 911 services provided to PSAPs, as that term is defined in § 56-484.12.

C. The Commission shall continue to have jurisdiction and authority over Lifeline telephone service such as the Virginia Universal Service Plan, but shall not impose Lifeline telephone service obligations on competitive telephone companies that do not seek designation as eligible telecommunications carriers or impose Lifeline telephone service obligations over and above that imposed by the default Lifeline plan imposed by the Federal Communications Commission.

D. The Commission shall continue to have jurisdiction and authority to permit existing and new retail tariffs to be filed by competitive telephone companies; however, nothing in this chapter shall be construed to require a competitive telephone company to file tariffs concerning retail services.

E. Existing extended local service calling plans ordered by the Commission pursuant to Article 4 (§ 56-484.1 et seq.) of Chapter 15 that are applicable to competitive telephone companies shall remain in effect, but shall not be expanded by the Commission. The Commission shall continue to have jurisdiction and authority to enforce these extended local service calling plans, but shall not create any new plans.

F. The Commission shall continue to have jurisdiction and authority to grant, amend, reissue, and cancel certificates of public convenience and necessity of competitive telephone companies.

G. The Commission may promulgate such rules, including the revision and repeal of current rules, as may be necessary to implement the specific authority granted in this chapter.

H. The Commission shall continue to enforce the Utility Transfers Act (§ 56-88 et seq.) regarding competitive telephone companies.

§ 56-54.6. Duties of a competitive telephone company.

A. A competitive telephone company that is an incumbent telephone carrier shall have the duty in its incumbent territory to extend or expand its facilities to furnish retail voice service and facilities when the person, firm, or corporation does not have service available from one or more alternative providers of wireline or terrestrial wireless communications services at prevailing market rates.

B. A competitive telephone company shall continue to have the powers and duties provided in the first sentence of subdivision A 2 of § 56-234.

C. For the purposes of subsections A and B, the Commission shall have the authority, upon request of an individual, corporation, or other entity, or a competitive telephone company, to determine whether the wireline or terrestrial wireless communications service available to the party requesting service is a reasonably adequate alternative to local exchange telephone service.

D. The use by a competitive telephone company of wireline and terrestrial wireless technologies shall not be construed to grant any additional jurisdiction or authority to the Commission over such technologies.

E. For purposes of subsection A, "prevailing market rates" means rates similar to those generally available to consumers in competitive areas for the same services.

F. A competitive telephone company shall have the obligation to provide access to emergency 911 service to its end-user retail customers.

§ 56-54.7. Service provided to the Commonwealth.

The Commission shall have no jurisdiction or authority over (i) schedules of rates for any telecommunications service provided to the public by virtue of any contract with, (ii) any service provided under or relating to a contract for telecommunications services with, or (iii) contracts for service rendered by any competitive telephone company to, the Commonwealth or any agency thereof.

§ 56-57. Securities to which chapter is applicable.

A. This chapter shall apply to every stock or stock certificate or other evidence of interest or ownership, and, except as otherwise provided by § 56-65, every bond, note or other evidence of indebtedness, of a public service company, which may be issued, and to every obligation or liability as guarantor, endorser, surety or otherwise in respect of the securities of any other person, firm, association or corporation, when such securities are payable at periods of twelve months or more after the date thereof, which may be or may have been assumed after March 24, 1934, notwithstanding the fact that any preparatory steps, whether by the issuance or amendment of a certificate of incorporation, or by the action of the board of directors, or the stockholders or otherwise, may have been taken prior to such date.

B. Notwithstanding subsection A, this chapter shall not apply to any stock or stock certificate or other evidence of interest or ownership, or any bond, note or other evidence of indebtedness of a (i) public service company that operates under an alternative form of regulation approved by the Commission pursuant to § 56-235.5, unless the Commission rescinds such exemption as hereafter authorized, or (ii) competitive telephone company as defined in § 56-54.2, provided such securities are issued for lawful purposes pursuant to § 56-58. Any public service company exempt from this chapter shall instead provide notice to the Commission of the issuance of any stock or stock certificate or other

evidence of interest or ownership, or, except as otherwise provided by §§ 56-65 and 56-65.1, any bond, note or other evidence of indebtedness, within ninety days of issuance. The Commission may rescind the exemption from this chapter provided by this subsection to any public service company that operates under an alternative form of regulation approved by the Commission pursuant to § 56-235.5 if the Commission finds, after notice and an opportunity for a hearing, that such exemption is not in the public interest.

2. That any order issued by the State Corporation Commission pursuant to any authority the Commission had to regulate, supervise, or promulgate rules relating to the retail services, rates, and terms of service of a telephone company, which authority ceases to exist upon the effective date of this act, shall have no effect from and after such date. Orders issued by the Commission pursuant to authority granted, continued, or otherwise preserved under this act, including rules promulgated under such orders, shall continue in effect.

3. That notwithstanding the provisions of this act, (i) the residential price cap approved by the State Corporation Commission in Case No. PUC-2012-00008 shall continue in effect until it expires as currently scheduled on December 31, 2014, and (ii) any safeguards ordered by the Commission in response to competitive service applications filed pursuant to subsection F of § 56-235.5 of the Code of Virginia after January 1, 2014, shall continue in effect as ordered by the Commission.