

BEFORE THE TENNESSEE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

October 5, 2016

IN RE:

**PETITION OF GLOBAL CONNECTION INC. OF
AMERICA FOR DESIGNATION AS AN ELIGIBLE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER IN THE
STATE OF TENNESSEE**

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**DOCKET NO.
16-00080**

**ORDER DESIGNATING GLOBAL CONNECTION INC. OF AMERICA AS AN
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER**

This matter came before Vice Chairman Robin Morrison, Director Herbert H. Hilliard, and Director Kenneth C. Hill of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority (the “Authority” or “TRA”), the voting panel assigned to this docket, at the regularly scheduled Authority Conference held on September 12, 2016, for consideration of the *Petition for Designation as a Wireline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier* (“*Petition*”) filed by Global Connection Inc. of America (“Global Connection” or “Company”) on July 15, 2016.

BACKGROUND

Global Connection is a Georgia corporation and is authorized to conduct business as a foreign corporation in the State of Tennessee. The Company was granted a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (“CCN”) to provide intrastate telecommunications services within the State of Tennessee pursuant to the TRA’s Order entered on September 14, 1999 in Docket No. 99-00624. The Company offers pre-paid wireline local exchange and long distance telecommunications services to customers in the Tennessee service territories of BellSouth

Telecommunications, LLC d/b/a AT&T Tennessee (“AT&T”), CenturyLink Communications, LLC (“CenturyLink”) and Frontier Communications of America, Inc. (“Frontier”).¹

Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2), 47 C.F.R. § 54.101-54.207 and the rules and regulations of the Authority, Global Connection filed its *Petition* seeking designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”) in the State of Tennessee in order to provide Lifeline services to qualifying Tennessee consumers and to receive support from the low-income program of the federal Universal Service Fund (“USF”). Global Connection currently provides Lifeline service in Tennessee through resale of AT&T’s retail Lifeline service. Global Connection seeks ETC designation at this time due to the recently issued Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) rule changes, which will eliminate USF support for non-ETC resellers of Lifeline service.² Global Connection does not seek access to USF funds for the purpose of providing service to high cost areas.

In the *Petition*, Global Connection states that it satisfies all of the statutory and regulatory requirements for ETC designation. The Company further states that approval of its *Petition* will further the public interest by providing Tennessee consumers in the designated service areas, especially low-income consumers, with low prices, high quality services, and expanded availability of affordable telecommunications services.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ETC DESIGNATION

Section 254(e) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the “Act”), provides that “only an eligible telecommunications carrier designated under section 214(e) shall be eligible to receive specific federal universal support.”³ Section 214(e)(2) of the Act authorizes state commissions, such as the Authority, to designate ETC status for USF purposes “consistent

¹ *Petition*, pp. 2-3 (July 15, 2016).

² See *In the Matter of Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization Telecommunications Carriers Eligible for Universal Service Support, Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 11-42, WC Docket No. 09-197, WC Docket No. 10-90, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Order on Reconsideration, Second Report and Order, and Memorandum Opinion and Order, FCC 15-71 (rel. June 22, 2015) (“*Second Report and Order*”), section IV.B.

³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(e).

with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”⁴ Applicants for ETC designation must be common carriers that will offer all of the services supported by universal service, either using their own facilities or a combination of their own facilities and the resale of another carrier’s services.⁵ Applicants also must advertise the availability and rates of such services using media of general distribution.⁶ Additionally, because Global Connection is not a rural telephone company as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 153(44), it is required to describe the geographic areas within which it requests ETC designation.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

During the regularly scheduled Authority Conference on September 12, 2016, the panel considered Global Connection’s *Petition*. Upon review, the Authority finds that Global Connection meets the requirements for ETC designation, as follows:

Global Connection is authorized to provide services in the areas for which it seeks ETC designation, and it is a common carrier as that term is defined in the Act. Further, the Company has affirmed that it is able to provide all of the services and functionalities required by 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.202(a) including the following: voice grade access to the public switched network; minutes of use for local service and access to emergency services.⁷ Global Connection will advertise the availability and rates for these services described using media of general distribution.

Global Connection requests ETC designation for only low-income support in the exchanges of AT&T Tennessee, CenturyLink and Frontier.⁸ It does not seek designation as an ETC to qualify for high-cost universal service support.⁹ The Company commits to providing its Lifeline service throughout the proposed designated service area, and to provide to its customers

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2).

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

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

⁷ *Petition*, pp. 8-9 (July 15, 2016).

⁸ *Id.* at 1.

⁹ *Id.* at 1, 20.

the same ability to remain functional in emergency situations as is currently provided by the incumbent local exchange carrier to its own customers.

In addition, Global Connection commits to satisfying all applicable consumer protection and service quality standards, and to reporting consumer protection and service quality information on an annual basis consistent with 47 C.F.R. § 54.422.¹⁰ The Company is financially and technically capable of providing Lifeline-supported services. Global Connection will certify and verify consumer eligibility in accordance with applicable FCC and Authority requirements.¹¹

Finally, Global Connection's designation as an ETC is consistent with the public interest because (a) it will provide low-income Tennessee residents with the reliability and security offered by wireline services; (b) it will offer more competitive choice to these residents; and (c) the Company is currently offering services in service areas described in the *Petition* and has several hundred Tennessee customers.

Therefore, the panel voted unanimously to grant the *Petition* and to designate Global Connection as an ETC in the requested service areas for the limited purpose of receiving low-income federal universal service support.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED THAT:

1. The *Petition for Designation as a Wireline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier* filed by Global Connection Inc. of America is granted.
2. Global Connection Inc. of America is designated as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in the requested Tennessee service areas for the limited purpose of receiving federal low-income Universal Service Fund support.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 14.

¹¹ *Id.* at 16-17.

3. Global Connection Inc. of America shall report annually to the Authority the information required by 47 C.F.R. § 54.416 and 54.422.

Vice Chairman Robin Morrison, Director Herbert H. Hilliard and Director Kenneth C. Hill concur.

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Earl Taylor", written in black ink.

Earl R. Taylor, Executive Director