

# Attachment 3

Docket No. P405-P407/CI-18-  
122

Department Comments

Jan. 4, 2019

**FOR THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

121 Seventh Place East, Suite 350  
St. Paul, MN 55101-2147

Nancy Lange  
Dan Lipschultz  
Matt Schuerger  
John Tuma  
Katie Sieben

Chair  
Commissioner  
Commissioner  
Commissioner  
Commissioner

In the Matter of a Commission Inquiry into the  
Service Quality, Customer Service, and Billing  
Practices of Frontier Communications

Docket No. P407, 405/CI-18-122

**AFFIDAVIT OF JEFF S.  
LACHER**

STATE OF MINNESOTA    )  
  ) ss.  
COUNTY OF HENNEPIN    )

I, Jeff S. Lacher, being first duly sworn on oath do depose and state:

1. I am the Staff Representative/Organizer for the Communications Workers of America, District 7. My office is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I represent *field technicians employed by Frontier who serve customers in part of Minnesota*, as well as Small Business Customer Service Representatives, Facility Assignors, and other Frontier employees who provide services Nationwide, as well as Minnesota. My union represents dispatchers, customer service representatives, and others, in many areas of the country who provide services to customers nationwide, including Minnesota.
2. The purpose of my affidavit is to provide information that explains and clarifies: 1) the auto-dialer process used by Frontier to call customers when Frontier cannot meet its commitment; 2) how tickets might appear to customer service representatives to be "lost;" 3) the significant decline in Frontier technicians; 4)

disincentives in creating repair tickets; and 5) some consequences of Frontier's outside customer service vendors;

3. In roughly 2012, the Residential Customer Service Call Center in Burnsville Minnesota, where trouble ticket and job orders were created for the work assigned to field technicians, was closed. In December of 2016, the dispatch center in Burnsville Minnesota, was closed. Thus, while I was unable to confirm that the practices I discuss below continue to the present day, to the best of my knowledge, the information I provide describes current practices.
4. When a Dispatcher knows that a technician will be unable to make it to a customer to perform a repair or installation, as scheduled,<sup>1</sup> the Dispatcher sends the record into an auto-dialer system as there will need to be a new date scheduled for the repair. The auto-dialer calls the customer number that is on the ticket or order<sup>2</sup>. The customer hears a recording, which states that a technician is unable to be there today. The customer is either provided a new date and time when the repair is scheduled, or instructed to call back into Frontier to schedule a different day and time. In this process, a new due date is assigned.
5. If there is no call back number for the customer or the only number is out-of-service, the customer's job is placed back into "Pending". When it hits the "Pending" queue after being "Jep" called, the Pending Queue loads the Techs with their jobs for the following day. Again, if the Techs cannot get through the jobs on their load, they would either call the customer or send it back to the Pending queue, where it again goes to the auto-dialer, as described above.
6. Customers that were expecting a technician who did not arrive as scheduled may call Frontier and be told that their ticket was lost. Tickets cannot be "lost."

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<sup>1</sup> The calls are then referred to as "Jep" calls—meaning that they are in Jeopardy of not getting done by the scheduled time—but in practice they were not in jeopardy in the sense that it was clear they are already late)

<sup>2</sup> "Tickets" refer to Out-of-Service or other problem calls. "Orders" refer to new service or upgrade calls. Collectively, "Tickets" and "Orders" are referred to as "jobs."

Tickets are either open, closed once completed, canceled by the customer if they call back and the service is now working, or deactivated.

7. The number of Frontier technicians in Minnesota on the CWA roster has significantly declined since 2008, likely resulting in many more customers not having their repair take place as scheduled, and then going through the autodialer process, discussed above. The below table shows the CWA field technicians working for Frontier in Minnesota.

	2008	2014	2018
Metro	40	28	25
LeCenter	10	9	10
Fairmont	11	6	2
Worthington	7	6	2
Slayton	3	2	3
Canby	4	2	2

8. The same technicians who perform repairs on tickets also install new services on orders, and it is the same technicians that repair and install both telephone and internet services. If greater emphasis is placed on completion of new service installation orders, it takes longer for repair tickets to be addressed, with the problems being even more significant with the reduction in technicians. Further, the prioritization of a technician's work appears to clearly be:

- a. Newer tickets take priority over old tickets since the old tickets have already missed the required standard for the repair.
- b. New service installations are prioritized over repairs. Although this is not the written policy, it appears to be the case as evidenced by the fact

that overtime is granted for technicians to complete orders, but no overtime is permitted to complete repairs.

c. Jobs receiving federal money take priority over repairs.

9. When a ticket is opened, whenever someone pulls up that account, it is flagged on the screen in the Endeavor database<sup>3</sup> as a ticket or order. If the flag is clicked, it will show the trouble ticket or order type and also show the ticket or order number. If an entry is made to show that a ticket has been completed, or closed by the technician or another department, the flag will not be there when the account is accessed. The normal procedure is for closed tickets be in the VXfield, database<sup>4</sup>. The customer's closed ticket contains the technician's notes detailing the work done to resolve the issue.
10. Even when more than one ticket is created for the same job, those tickets are not lost. If a customer calls in and reaches a poorly trained vendor or Frontier Customer Service Representative (CSR), more than one ticket may be created for the same problem. When these tickets are made, they are assigned a line card<sup>5</sup> and only one job at a time can have a line card. Extra or duplicate tickets go into an error queue, which is managed by the Dispatch Department. Dispatch then cancels the duplicate tickets. Error tickets that are not duplicates may be sent back to a CSR to collect missing information. A cancelled ticket remains in the VXfield database and is discoverable with a search.

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<sup>3</sup> Endeavor (also referred to as DPI or "Green Screens") is the database accessed by Customer Service Representatives to enter and retrieve customer information, attach line cards and create tickets and orders.

<sup>4</sup> VXField (also referred to as Verisae, formerly known as ViryaNet) is the database used by field technicians to see their next job, enter notes, find customer information and close completed jobs. In VXField, a different number is used to refer to the same ticket appearing in Endeavor. If a Tech or Dispatcher finds a record in VXField (searching by phone number), it refers back to the ticket located in Endeavor, however, the record in Endeavor does not identify the Ticket number in VXField.

<sup>5</sup> A "Line Card" is a essentially a database record for a Customer which includes Name, Address, Phone #, Billing Info, Payment record, and the facilities associated with the customer's services (e.g., the central office, cable, crossbox, terminal).

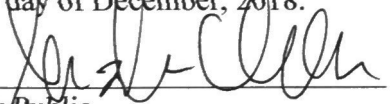
11. There may also be a significant customer service issue due to vendors ‘dumping’ customers into other call queues if they don’t want to, or know how to, handle the call. It could be a billing issue, service issue, or any other issue. Many times when a CWA member gets a call, the customer will say they were just talking to someone else, were placed on hold, and were passed along. Since Frontier employees are unable to contact the vendor who last “touched” the record, the customer will have to start all over explaining the reason for their call.
12. It is clear that the problems of customers being passed along without receiving any real help is predominantly cause by vendors, because each time someone enters a customer’s phone number in the system and pulls up an account, the system will automatically ‘stamp’ that account with the date, time, and the CSR’s ID. Vendors ID numbers all begin with “V\_” (e.g., V\_ABC123).
13. Since Frontier closed its Repair Departments in December of 2016, which only handled repair calls, CSRs now handle both Orders and Tickets. There is an incentive for CSRs to avoid repair calls. CSRs are required to meet sales goals every month before they are eligible to receive commissions and these sales goals have increased substantially over time. Low wages for CSRs mean commissions are a significant part of their incomes. The failure to meet sales goals for a period of time could mean discipline or termination. By shortening the time spent on repair calls and creating tickets, or by quickly dumping repair calls to other departments, a CSR is more available to receive Order calls.
14. The Vendor issues with calls being dumped, as described above, may be the result of similar incentives. I do not have specific knowledge of Frontier’s contracts and policies or even who the vendors may be, but, from my experience with customer service employees for vendors at other companies, sales goals, call-handling time, and other “metrics” are more severe than the companies from which they are out-sourced. With generally low wages and an opportunity for commissions on sales calls, CSR’s employed by Vendors may have a strong incentive to ‘dump’ repair calls as quickly as possible.

15. If a Customer calls in with *both* a repair issue *and* an order, the CSR must essentially choose between entering it as an order or a ticket since only one can be assigned to a line card at a time. CSR's get commissions for orders but not tickets, providing an incentive to ignore the problem and create an order. When the customer calls back in about the repair issue, the order may be closed, and there would be no ticket on their line card. The customer may be told that their ticket was lost, but there may never have been a ticket opened.
16. In some cases when there is an area-wide issue, such as a cable cut, all tickets related to the cut will be grouped as a "Common Cause" ticket and assigned a Common Cause number. Once the trouble has been cleared, those tickets will then be closed by the person handling the Common Causes. It is possible that tickets that are not related to the Common Cause, but identified as such, are closed despite not being corrected. If a customer calls in for the same issue, but the ticket had been closed when a Common Cause issue was cleared, a new ticket would be created with a new due date.
17. If a customer calls concerning a previously requested repair and gives a phone number on their account, and they have more than one line (less common for residential customers), the Vendor or Frontier CSR taking the call, must check every number on the account if they don't find the ticket using the number given by the customer, since the original ticket may have been written using one of the customers other numbers on the account. Vendors fielding customer calls may not have access to the VXfield database or have not been trained to use it. As a result of being unable to find the customer's ticket, the CSR may tell the customer their ticket has been "lost."

Further your affiant sayeth naught.

  
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Jeff S. Lacher

Subscribed and sworn before me on  
This day of December, 2018.

  
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Notary Public 12/13/18

