

DS 98-225

BELL ATLANTIC

Request to Introduce National 411 Directory Assistance

Order Approving the Request

O R D E R N O. 23,201

April 20, 1999

On December 28, 1998, New England Telephone and Telegraph Company, d/b/a Bell Atlantic - New Hampshire (BA-NH or Company) petitioned the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission (Commission) for authority to introduce National 411(N-411) Directory Assistance. Along with the petition, BA-NH provided cost information. On January 4, 1999, the Company filed a public notice of the filing.

This filing introduces national directory assistance for customer listings situated outside of New Hampshire. A customer would only be required to dial 411 and tell the Bell Atlantic operator the desired city, state and listing name. The proposed rate is \$0.95 per call, which, according to Bell Atlantic, is the mid-point of what competitors charge for national directory service.

At the request of Commission Staff, the Commission issued Order No. 23,118 on January 27, 1999 extending the time to review the petition by 30 days, pursuant to RSA 378:6, IV, in order to provide additional time to review the cost information provided by the Company. Staff completed its review of the filing

and recommended approval on February 16,1999.

On February 23, 1999, the Commission issued Order No. 23,154 which denied the request and ordered a hearing to be held. The Commission was concerned that Bell Atlantic's abbreviated three digit dialing pattern would result in an unfair competitive advantage compared to the manner in which customers access an alternative carrier's directory assistance service. In addition, the Commission was concerned customers would not be adequately informed of the charges at the time the customer makes a 411 call.

A hearing was held before the Commission on March 17, 1999. At the hearing, Bell Atlantic witness Vincent Woodbury addressed the concerns outlined above. According to BA-NH, abbreviated dialing will promote rather than deter competition because AT&T and MCI, major competitors in this market, already use abbreviated dialing for this service. For example, AT&T customers dial "00" and MCI customers dial "10-10-9000". Therefore, BA-NH will not have a competitive advantage over AT&T and MCI. BA-NH claims that its entry into the New Hampshire market, and use of 411, will encourage existing national directory providers to offer a service that is comparable to or better than BA-NH's service.

As part of its introduction of N-411 service, BA-NH will commence a consumer education and advertising program. This program will include bill inserts, radio and print advertisements

informing consumers the service is now available and of the 95 cent charge for each out-of-state directory listing request.

Evidence submitted in this docket persuades us that BA-NH's proposed service is a competitive offering and will provide additional options to consumers. Additionally, our concerns about customers' awareness of the charges are ameliorated by the fact that only customers who are aware of the new offering will ask for non-603 directory assistance and by BA-NH's commencement of a public education and advertisement program. We, therefore, find the request for approval of N-411 service is in the public interest and grant approval.

Based upon the foregoing, it is hereby

ORDERED, that the request for approval of National 411 directory assistance service is GRANTED.

By order of the Public Utilities Commission of New
Hampshire this twentieth day of April, 1999.

Douglas L. Patch
Chairman

Susan S. Geiger
Commissioner

Nancy Brockway
Commissioner

Attested by:

Kimberly Nolin Smith
Assistant Secretary