

as necessary and in a timely manner at any time before a decision is rendered on the merits of the complaint.

(b) *Copies to be Filed.* Unless otherwise directed by specific regulation or the Commission, an original and two (2) copies of all pleadings shall be filed in accordance with § 0.401(a) of this chapter, except that petitions requiring fees as set forth at part 1, subpart G of this chapter must be filed in accordance with § 0.401(b) of this chapter.

(c) *Fivolous pleadings.* It shall be unlawful for any party to file a frivolous pleading with the Commission. Any violation of this paragraph shall constitute an abuse of process subject to appropriate sanctions.

[64 FR 6569, Feb. 10, 1999]

§ 76.7 General special relief, waiver, enforcement, complaint, show cause, forfeiture, and declaratory ruling procedures.

(a) *Initiating pleadings.* In addition to the general pleading requirements, initiating pleadings must adhere to the following requirements:

(1) *Petitions.* On petition by any interested party, cable television system operator, a multichannel video programming distributor, local franchising authority, or an applicant, permittee, or licensee of a television broadcast or translator station, the Commission may waive any provision of this part 76, impose additional or different requirements, issue a ruling on a complaint or disputed question, issue a show cause order, revoke the certification of the local franchising authority, or initiate a forfeiture proceeding. Petitions may be submitted informally by letter.

(2) *Complaints.* Complaints shall conform to the relevant rule section under which the complaint is being filed.

(3) *Certificate of service.* Petitions and Complaints shall be accompanied by a certificate of service on any cable television system operator, franchising authority, station licensee, permittee, or applicant, or other interested person who is likely to be directly affected if the relief requested is granted.

(4) *Statement of relief requested.* (i) The petition or complaint shall state the relief requested. It shall state fully and precisely all pertinent facts and con-

siderations relied on to demonstrate the need for the relief requested and to support a determination that a grant of such relief would serve the public interest.

(ii) The petition or complaint shall set forth all steps taken by the parties to resolve the problem, except where the only relief sought is a clarification or interpretation of the rules.

(iii) A petition or complaint may, on request of the filing party, be dismissed without prejudice as a matter of right prior to the adoption date of any final action taken by the Commission with respect to the petition or complaint. A request for the return of an initiating document will be regarded as a request for dismissal.

(5) *Failure to prosecute.* Failure to prosecute petition or complaint, or failure to respond to official correspondence or request for additional information, will be cause for dismissal. Such dismissal will be without prejudice if it occurs prior to the adoption date of any final action taken by the Commission with respect to the initiating pleading.

(b) *Responsive pleadings.* In addition to the general pleading requirements, responsive pleadings must adhere to the following requirements:

(1) *Comments/oppositions to petitions.* Unless otherwise directed by the Commission, interested persons may submit comments or oppositions within twenty (20) days after the date of public notice of the filing of such petition. Comments or oppositions shall be served on the petitioner and on all persons listed in petitioner's certificate of service, and shall contain a detailed full showing, supported by affidavit, of any facts or considerations relied on.

(2) *Answers to complaints.* (i) Unless otherwise directed by the Commission, any party who is served with a complaint shall file an answer in accordance with the following, and the relevant rule section under which the complaint is being filed.

(ii) The answer shall be filed within 20 days of service of the complaint, unless another period is set forth in the relevant rule section.

(iii) The answer shall advise the parties and the Commission fully and completely of the nature of any and all defenses, and shall respond specifically to all material allegations of the complaint. Collateral or immaterial issues shall be avoided in answers and every effort should be made to narrow the issues. Any party against whom a complaint is filed failing to file and serve an answer within the time and in the manner prescribed by these rules may be deemed in default and an order may be entered against defendant in accordance with the allegations contained in the complaint.

(iv) The answer shall admit or deny the averments on which the adverse party relies. If the defendant is without knowledge or information sufficient to form a belief as to the truth of an averment, the defendant shall so state and this has the effect of a denial. When a defendant intends in good faith to deny only part of an averment, the answer shall specify so much of it as is true and shall deny only the remainder. The defendant may make its denials as specific denials of designated averments or paragraphs, or may generally deny all the averments except such designated averments or paragraphs as the defendant expressly admits. When the defendant intends to controvert all averments, the defendant may do so by general denial.

(v) Averments in a complaint are deemed to be admitted when not denied in the answer.

(c) *Reply.* In addition to the general pleading requirements, reply comments and replies must adhere to the following requirements:

(1) The petitioner or complainant may file a reply to a responsive pleading which shall be served on all persons who have filed pleadings and shall also contain a detailed full showing, supported by affidavit, of any additional facts or considerations relied on. Unless expressly permitted by the Commission, reply comments and replies to an answer shall not contain new matters.

(2) Failure to reply will not be deemed an admission of any allegations contained in the responsive pleading, except with respect to any affirmative defense set forth therein.

(3) Unless otherwise directed by the Commission or the relevant rule section, comments and replies to answers must be filed within ten (10) days after submission of the responsive pleading.

(d) *Motions.* Except as provided in this section, or upon a showing of extraordinary circumstances, additional motions or pleadings by any party will not be accepted.

(e) *Additional procedures and written submissions.* (1) The Commission may specify other procedures, such as oral argument or evidentiary hearing directed to particular aspects, as it deems appropriate. In the event that an evidentiary hearing is required, the Commission will determine, on the basis of the pleadings and such other procedures as it may specify, whether temporary relief should be afforded any party pending the hearing and the nature of any such temporary relief.

(2) The Commission may require the parties to submit any additional information it deems appropriate for a full, fair, and expeditious resolution of the proceeding, including copies of all contracts and documents reflecting arrangements and understandings alleged to violate the requirements set forth in the Communications Act and in this part, as well as affidavits and exhibits.

(3) The Commission may, in its discretion, require the parties to file briefs summarizing the facts and issues presented in the pleadings and other record evidence.

(i) These briefs shall contain the findings of fact and conclusions of law which that party is urging the Commission to adopt, with specific citations to the record, and supported by relevant authority and analysis.

(ii) Any briefs submitted shall be filed concurrently by both the complainant and defendant at such time as is designated by the staff. Such briefs shall not exceed fifty (50) pages.

(iii) Reply briefs may be submitted by either party within twenty (20) days from the date initial briefs are due. Reply briefs shall not exceed thirty (30) pages.

(f) *Discovery.* (1) The Commission staff may in its discretion order discovery limited to the issues specified by the Commission. Such discovery

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may include answers to written interrogatories, depositions or document production.

(2) The Commission staff may in its discretion direct the parties to submit discovery proposals, together with a memorandum in support of the discovery requested. Such discovery requests may include answers to written interrogatories, document production or depositions. The Commission staff may hold a status conference with the parties, pursuant to § 76.8 of this part, to determine the scope of discovery, or direct the parties regarding the scope of discovery. If the Commission staff determines that extensive discovery is required or that depositions are warranted, the staff may advise the parties that the proceeding will be referred to an administrative law judge in accordance with paragraph (g) of this section.

(g) *Referral to administrative law judge.*

(1) After reviewing the pleadings, and at any stage of the proceeding thereafter, the Commission staff may, in its discretion, designate any proceeding or discrete issues arising out of any proceeding for an adjudicatory hearing before an administrative law judge.

(2) Before designation for hearing, the staff shall notify, either orally or in writing, the parties to the proceeding of its intent to so designate, and the parties shall be given a period of ten (10) days to elect to resolve the dispute through alternative dispute resolution procedures, or to proceed with an adjudicatory hearing. Such election shall be submitted in writing to the Commission.

(3) Unless otherwise directed by the Commission, or upon motion by the Media Bureau Chief, the Media Bureau Chief shall not be deemed to be a party to a proceeding designated for a hearing before an administrative law judge pursuant to this paragraph (g).

(h) *System community units outside the Contiguous States.* On a finding that the public interest so requires, the Commission may determine that a system community unit operating or proposing to operate in a community located outside of the 48 contiguous states shall comply with provisions of subparts D, F, and G of this part in addition to the provisions thereof otherwise applicable.

(i) *Commission ruling.* The Commission, after consideration of the pleadings, may determine whether the public interest would be served by the grant, in whole or in part, or denial of the request, or may issue a ruling on the complaint or dispute, issue an order to show cause, or initiate a forfeiture proceeding.

NOTE 1 TO § 76.7: After issuance of an order to show cause pursuant to this section, the rules of procedure in Title 47, part 1, subpart A, §§ 1.91-1.95 of this chapter shall apply.

NOTE 2 TO § 76.7: Nothing in this section is intended to prevent the Commission from initiating show cause or forfeiture proceedings on its own motion; Provided, however, that show cause proceedings and forfeiture proceedings pursuant to § 1.80(g) of this chapter will not be initiated by such motion until the affected parties are given an opportunity to respond to the Commission's charges.

NOTE 3 TO § 76.7: Forfeiture proceedings are generally nonhearing matters conducted pursuant to the provisions of § 1.80(f) of this chapter (Notice of Apparent Liability). Petitioners who contend that the alternative hearing procedures of § 1.80(g) of this chapter should be followed in a particular case must support this contention with a specific showing of the facts and considerations relied on.

NOTE 4 TO § 76.7: To the extent a conflict is perceived between the general pleading requirements of this section, and the procedural requirements of a specific section, the procedural requirements of the specific section should be followed.

[64 FR 6569, Feb. 10, 1999, as amended at 67 FR 13234, Mar. 21, 2002]

§ 76.8 Status conference.

(a) In any proceeding subject to the part 76 rules, the Commission staff may in its discretion direct the attorneys and/or the parties to appear for a conference to consider:

(1) Simplification or narrowing of the issues;

(2) The necessity for or desirability of amendments to the pleadings, additional pleadings, or other evidentiary submissions;

(3) Obtaining admissions of fact or stipulations between the parties as to any or all of the matters in controversy;

(4) Settlement of the matters in controversy by agreement of the parties;