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FCC Enforcement Monitor January 2026

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HEADLINES

Pillsbury's communications lawyers have published the FCC Enforcement Monitor monthly since 1999 to inform our clients of notable FCC enforcement actions against FCC license holders and others. This month's issue includes:

- *Satellite Communications Company Resolves Team Telecom Agreement Violations Through $175,000 Consent Decree*
- *Michigan AM Station Cited for Tower and Other Violations*
- *Five LPFM Applications Dismissed for Failing to Meet Localism Requirements*

$175,000 Consent Decree for Satellite Communications Company's Team Telecom Compliance Failures

The FCC's Enforcement Bureau entered into a Consent Decree with a provider of satellite communications services to resolve an investigation into violations involving its international Section 214 and earth station authorizations. The Consent Decree represents the first time a grantee has agreed to a financial penalty for violating a Team Telecom mitigation agreement.

Grant of the authorizations had been expressly conditioned on the company's ongoing compliance with a Team Telecom mitigation agreement. Team Telecom is an interagency group led by the Departments of Justice (DOJ), Homeland Security, and Defense. It reviews foreign involvement in U.S. telecommunications transactions for national security and law enforcement concerns. When Team Telecom identifies potential risks resulting from foreign involvement in a proposed transaction, it may recommend that the FCC not approve the transaction, or enter into a mitigation agreement with the applicant designed to ameliorate those concerns.

Where an applicant enters into a mitigation agreement, Team Telecom will typically inform the FCC that it does not object to the proposed transaction so long as the approval is conditioned upon continuing compliance with the mitigation agreement. The FCC then makes an independent decision as to whether to grant the requested authorization, but tends to defer to Team Telecom's judgment regarding matters of foreign involvement, including as to whether the grant should be conditioned on compliance with a Team Telecom mitigation agreement.

The investigation at the core of this Consent Decree stemmed from a May 2024 referral by the DOJ, which received a notification from the company requesting approval to permit several foreign employees to have access to the company's U.S. communications infrastructure and customer information. The mitigation agreement required that the company submit foreign employee access requests to DOJ at least 30 days prior to permitting access. The DOJ's review of this request led to a finding that the company had already provided access to numerous foreign employees without first notifying the DOJ.

After the DOJ referred the alleged violation to the FCC, the FCC's Enforcement Bureau commenced an investigation which concluded that the company had failed to notify the DOJ before giving 186 foreign employees access to the company's U.S. communications infrastructure and customer information. The FCC concluded that the failure stemmed from the company's inadequate screening procedures. Although all 186 employees were later cleared by the DOJ, the requests were submitted only after the investigation commenced.

To resolve the matter, the company entered into a Consent Decree in which it admitted the facts surrounding the violations and agreed to implement new policies and procedures to prevent a recurrence. These include designating a compliance officer, creating formal operating procedures to prevent future violations, distributing a compliance manual to relevant staff, and conducting regular employee compliance training. The company also agreed to submit regular compliance reports to the FCC over the next three years and promptly notify the FCC of any future violations. Finally, it agreed to make a $175,000 voluntary contribution to the U.S. Treasury.

FCC Issues Notice of Violation to Michigan AM Station for Multiple Tower and Other Rule Violations

The FCC's Enforcement Bureau issued a Notice of Violation (NOV) to the owner of a Michigan AM radio station for multiple rule violations. The NOV notes that agents from the FCC's Columbia and Chicago field offices had inspected the radio station and tower sites on two separate days in February 2025 and once again in September 2025, finding multiple rule violations.

According to the NOV, the agents found that the licensee failed to maintain secure fencing around the station's towers as required by Section 73.49 of the FCC's Rules. The paint on the structures was also severely faded, and some of the required tower lights were inoperative over an extended period of time, in violation of Section 17.6 of the FCC's Rules.

When asked, the station could not produce the required Emergency Alert System (EAS) log or provide evidence that the chief operator had reviewed and signed the log. Section 73.1820(a)(1)(iii) of the FCC's Rules requires that EAS entries "be made in the station log," including an "entry of each test and activation of the Emergency Alert System," and Section 73.1870(c)(3) of the FCC's Rules requires a station's chief operator review "the station records at least once each week" and sign and date the log after completing this review.

In addition, the station was found to be operating at significantly less than its authorized daytime and nighttime power levels without prior FCC approval in violation of Section 73.1560(a)(1) of the FCC's Rules. The station was also unable to provide documentation showing that the required equipment performance tests or field strength measurements had been conducted, as required by Sections 73.1225(c) and 73.61 of the FCC's Rules.

The NOV requires that the station owner submit a written response to the FCC within 20 days fully explaining each alleged violation and all relevant surrounding facts and circumstances, including the specific actions taken to correct any violations and prevent recurrence. The NOV further requires the licensee to submit a timeline for completing any corrective actions to address the violations, and support its response with an affidavit or declaration from an authorized officer of the company. While the NOV does not itself impose a fine, the FCC may take additional enforcement action after reviewing the licensee's response, including, among other things, issuing a Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture.

FCC Dismisses Five LPFM Applications for Failing to Meet Localism Requirements

In separate decisions, the FCC's Media Bureau dismissed five applications for new low power FM (LPFM) radio stations after determining that each of the respective applicants had falsely certified that it met the Commission's requirement that LPFM applicants be local to their proposed service area. Each application was filed during the 2023 LPFM filing window.

The dismissed applications were filed by religious or community organizations seeking to construct new LPFM stations in Nevada and Texas. Each applicant had certified that it qualified as "local" under Section 73.853(b) of the FCC's Rules, meaning that its headquarters is within 10 miles of the proposed transmitter site (20 miles in smaller markets) and that at least 75% of its board members reside within that radius. For each of these applications, the Media Bureau found the applicant's certification to be false, with none of the applicants meeting either of the two requirements.

Each of the applicants proposed operation in a large market where the 10-mile restriction would apply. However, in each case, the proposed transmitter site was more than 10 miles from the applicant's headquarters, and for one of the applications, was more than 26 miles away.

Similarly, despite each applicant certifying that 75% of its directors resided within 10 miles of the proposed transmitter site, the Media Bureau found that *not a single director of any of the five applicants* resided within that area, with some directors residing over 1,000 miles away.

In addition, one of the applicants was found to violate the foreign ownership restrictions in Section 310(b) of the Communications Act, which limits foreign entities from owning more than 20% of a radio station licensee, or holding more than 20% of its voting interests. Despite certifying in its application that it complied with the 20% foreign ownership limit, the applicant listed three board members controlling the entity, two of whom were not U.S. citizens. The FCC therefore concluded that 66.6% of the parties controlling the applicant were foreign citizens – significantly above the 20% level permitted by the Communications Act.

The FCC dismissed all five applications pursuant to Section 73.3566(a) of its Rules, finding each applicant ineligible to apply for or hold an LPFM license.