

STATE OF VERMONT
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 21-4060-PET

Petition of Consolidated Communications of Vermont Company, LLC and Consolidated Communications of Northland Company (both d/b/a “Consolidated Communications”) for approval of a Successor (2022-2024) Incentive Regulation Plan, pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 226b	
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PROTECTIVE ORDER

I. INTRODUCTION

On January 21, 2022, Consolidated Communications of Vermont Company, LLC and Consolidated Communications of Northland Company (both d/b/a “Consolidated Communications” hereafter “Consolidated”) filed a Motion for Confidential Treatment of portions of the Department of Public Service’s (“Department”) Prefiled Direct Testimony. Specifically, Consolidated states that portions of the Prefiled Direct Testimony of Department witnesses August Ankum and Carol Flint contain nonpublic, confidential and propriety information that is competitively sensitive and which should be maintained as confidential. Consolidated submitted Consolidated’s Averment No. 1 in support of its request for confidentiality. No party opposed Consolidated’s motion.

II. DISCUSSION

We have reviewed the motion and supporting materials, and we conclude that Consolidated has made a *prima facie* showing that confidential treatment is warranted for the information at issue. Therefore, we hereby grant Consolidated’s motion for confidential treatment.

To promote full public understanding of the basis for its decisions, the Public Utility Commission (“Commission”) has actively taken steps to limit the amount of information subject to protective orders. We have encouraged parties to remove material from that protection to the extent possible. Since 2001, we have required petitioners seeking a protective order to submit a document-specific (or information-specific) averment of the basis for keeping confidential any document (or information) that they wish to be kept under seal. This arrangement appropriately places a heavy burden on the party seeking confidentiality to justify that decision. It also ensures

that counsel for the party seeking confidentiality has actually reviewed and considered the relevant confidentiality factors, as they relate to the specific document or information at issue.¹ Generally, however, we only resolve disputes about information when there is a genuine disagreement about its confidential nature.²

In determining whether to protect confidential information, we consider the following issues:

- (1) Is the matter sought to be protected a trade secret or other confidential research, development, or commercial information which should be protected?
- (2) Would disclosure of such information cause a cognizable harm sufficient to warrant a protective order?
- (3) Has the party seeking protection shown “good cause” for invoking the Commission’s protection?³

Consolidated seeks confidential treatment of portions of the Prefiled Direct Testimony of August Ankum and Carol Flint. Consolidated asserts that the information contained in the confidential portions of this Prefiled Direct Testimony contains confidential information related to services in specific towns, total number of telephone service lines, and specifics of customer complaints, which is competitively sensitive information. Consolidated asks that this information be treated as confidential because public disclosure would harm Consolidated’s business by allowing competitors to compete more effectively against Consolidated, placing Consolidated at a competitive disadvantage. Further detail regarding the need for confidentiality is set forth in Consolidated Averment No. 1.

We have reviewed the motion and supporting materials, and we have applied the existing standard. We conclude that Consolidated has made a *prima facie* showing that the subject information is competitively sensitive, and therefore, warrants confidential treatment.

III. ORDER

Therefore, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the confidential information contained in the Prefiled Direct Testimony of Department witnesses August Ankum and Carol Flint (as described

¹ See e.g., *Joint Petition of Consolidated Communications Holding, Inc., Consolidated Communications, Inc., Falcon Merger Sub, Inc., FairPoint Communications, Inc., Telephone Operating Company of Vermont LLC, d/b/a FairPoint Communications, FairPoint Vermont, Inc., d/b/a FairPoint Communications, UI Long Distance, Inc., and Enhanced Communications of Northern New England, Inc., for approval of a transfer of control by merger, pursuant to 30 V.S.A. §§ 107, 108, 109, 231(a), and 311*, Case No. 8881 at 2 (Vt. Pub. Serv. Bd. May 4, 2017 Protective Order for Confidential Treatment of Evidence).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

more fully in Consolidated's motion and listed above, shall be treated in this proceeding as follows:

1. All testimony, affidavits, transcripts, exhibits, and other documents that are subject to this Order as confidential information, and any documents that discuss or reveal documents that constitute confidential material, shall be placed in a sealed record by filing such information in sealed envelopes or other appropriate sealed containers on which shall be endorsed the caption and docket number of the proceeding, the nature of the content (*e.g.*, exhibit, report, etc.), and a statement that it shall not be opened or released from the custody of the Clerk of the Commission except by Order of the Commission. Notwithstanding such a statement, the members of the Commission, any employee or consultant specifically authorized by the Commission to assist the Commission in this proceeding, and any Hearing Officer appointed to this Docket may have access to such sealed confidential information, but shall not disclose such information to any person.

2. At any hearing or conference in this proceeding, to the extent conducted, no persons, other than those who have signed or agreed to be bound by this Order and the Protective Agreement approved in this Docket, and those whom the Commission has expressly authorized to have access to this confidential information, shall be permitted to give, hear or review testimony given or held with respect to this confidential information.

3. Each Commission stenographer or reporter in this proceeding shall acknowledge and be bound by this Order. Each such Commission stenographer or reporter shall be instructed to and shall start a separate transcription for testimony or discussion on the record of confidential information. Such transcription shall be marked "Confidential" and shall be sealed and filed with the Clerk of the Commission, and copies of the same shall be made available only to those persons authorized to view such information. Such transcription shall, in all other respects, be treated as confidential information pursuant to this Order.

4. The Commission retains jurisdiction to make such amendments, modifications and additions to this Order as it may, from time to time, deem appropriate, including any such amendments, modifications or additions resulting from a motion made pursuant to the Protective Agreement.

5. Any party or other person may apply to the Commission for an amendment, modification or addition of this Order.

SO ORDERED.

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont, this ____ day of _____ 2022.

_____	)	
	)	PUBLIC
	)	UTILITY
	)	COMMISSION
_____	)	OF
	)	VERMONT
	)	
_____	)	

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

FILED: _____, 2022

ATTEST: _____
Clerk of the Commission

NOTICE TO READERS: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov)

Appeal of this decision to the Supreme Court of Vermont must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within thirty days. Appeal will not stay the effect of this Order, absent a further Order by this Commission or appropriate action by the Supreme Court of Vermont. Motions for reconsideration or stay, if any, must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within ten days of the date of this decision and order.