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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Telecommunications Act of 1996,¹ enacted in February of 1996, fundamentally revised the Communications Act of 1934, and thereby changed telecommunications regulation in the United States. Included among the many changes was the addition of new Section 256, titled "Coordination for Interconnection."²

The general purposes of the Act are to foster innovation, competition and deregulation in telecommunications. Section 256 requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to establish procedures to oversee coordinated network planning by telecommunications carriers and other providers of telecommunications service and permits the FCC to participate in the development of public network interconnectivity standards by appropriate industry standards-setting bodies. The purposes of Section 256 as stated in the statute are (1) to promote nondiscriminatory accessibility by the broadest number of users and vendors of communications products and services to public telecommunications networks, and (2) to ensure the ability of users and information providers to "seamlessly and transparently transmit and receive information between and across telecommunications networks."

In April of 1996 the FCC revised the charter³ of its Federal Advisory Committee, the Network Reliability Council, to advise the FCC on how it might best accomplish the responsibilities placed on it by Section 256. To reflect this mission, the Commission changed the name of the Council to "The Network Reliability and Interoperability Council."

The Council was first organized by the FCC in 1992 to provide expert advice to the Commission on issues requiring technical expertise in telecommunications issues. Consistent with the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the membership of the Council is broadly balanced to reflect the interests being addressed by its charter. It includes senior representatives from large and small local exchange telecommunications carriers, including both incumbent and competitive carriers; large and small interexchange carriers; terrestrial wireless and satellite service providers; cable television service providers; equipment manufacturers, of both network and customer premises equipment, representatives of institutional and residential consumers of telecommunications services; state regulators, telecommunications standards-setting bodies, various telecommunications related trade associations, and others.⁴

To develop the recommendations sought by the FCC, the Council met on a quarterly basis for one year. It organized several focus groups to study the issues raised by Section 256 and to

¹Pub. L. No. 104-104, codified at 47 U.S.C. Sec. 151 *et seq.*

²Section 256 is reprinted herein at Appendix A.

³The revised Charter of the NRIC is attached as Appendix D.

⁴The organizations participating in the NRIC are listed in Appendix F.