

A COUPLE FIXED-WIRELESS PROVIDERS FIND THEMSELVES IN A LURCH AS SPRINT CONTINUES WIMAX SHUTDOWN, PHONEARENA.COM

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One area where Sprint is prolific with its network is through partnerships it has with companies that resell its capacity. Indeed, many well-known pre-paid brands are either subsidiaries of, reseller partners, or network partners of Sprint, the latter owning part of the spectrum, but Sprint does all the heavy lifting.

Among such partners were companies known as “Educational Broadband Service” providers. Most of these companies operate as non-profits and either provide service for free, or at steep discounts to schools.

Mobile Citizen and Mobile Beacon leased their spectrum to now-defunct Clearwire for a period of 30 years, using the fees they get from Sprint to subsidize services to schools. Such clients had unlimited access and bandwidth via WiMAX, a 4G standard that never really earned wide distribution.

The two companies are now suing Sprint over throttled data as the carrier has been converting all its available WiMAX spectrum to LTE. Where schools are averaging anywhere from 30-300GB of data per month, Sprint is throttling the load after just 6GB, “a lethal blow” to entities like schools.

However, Sprint has made it clear that it was shutting down its WiMAX operations, and points out there are no unlimited data agreements with any customer. Sprint’s spokesperson further noted that the two EBS companies “receive significant fees from Sprint for use of their spectrum” and that the carrier provides them “with data capacity on our networks for free, which they resell to customers at rates that they determine at their sole discretion.”

Now that the final shutdown of the WiMAX services is looming, Mobile Citizen and Mobile Beacon are scrambling to maintain service to their customers. Sprint noted that the two companies have had more than a year to plan a migration to LTE, pointing out that other EBS partners have already made the move without undue drama.

TWO NONPROFITS SUE SPRINT ALLEGING CONTRACT VIOLATIONS, ANDROIDHEADLINES.COM

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A couple of non-profit organizations are suing struggling wireless service provider Sprint, for alleged violation of contract. Mobile Beacon and Mobile Citizen, the two organizations behind the lawsuit against America's fourth largest carrier, are vehemently protesting Sprint's plans to shut down its WiMAX network on the 6th of November. The lawsuit claims that shutting down the WiMAX network currently maintained by the carrier, will be nothing short of calamitous for the two non-profit organizations, who provide affordable internet connectivity to thousands of subscribers, most of whom are underprivileged and live in some of the poorer areas of the country. The organizations also provide internet connectivity to educational institutions, libraries and other non-profits at a discounted rate. Sprint's decision, the duo say, will affect a total of as many as 300,000 people nationwide, including school children and also adults who are part of the groups' digital literacy programs. Hence, the two organizations are suing Sprint for what they believe they is a violation of the carrier's contractual obligations, as part of an agreement the two had signed with a now-defunct telecom company called Clearwire.

The main contention of the two organizations is that their 2006 deal with the aforementioned telecom company that Sprint acquired back in 2013, clearly states that they would lease some of the spectrum they own to Clearwire, in exchange for monetary payments and access to the network build on the leased spectrum, in a way that would allow the two non-profits to then resell that network access to qualifying subscribers at a rate lower than prevailing market rates. The lawsuit further alleges that the carrier has put up severe constraints on LTE data usage, making it well-nigh impossible for the plaintiffs to switch over from WiMAX to LTE. Sprint, they allege, have already starting throttling data speeds to a measly 256 Kbps for subscribers with unlimited data plans, who switched to the carrier's LTE network as part of a "temporary bridge agreement" between the warring parties. The carrier is also apparently putting a cap of just 6 GB on data usage by schools that have switched over from WiMAX to LTE.

Sprint apparently is also shirking its responsibilities of providing equipment and technical support, according to the lawsuit, leading many schools and libraries to leave the program entirely. The director at one of the participating libraries, Mr. Ed Garcia, says that his employers, the Rhode Island's Cranston Public Library, is one of the victims of Sprint's new policy. "I just think that it's another instance of a corporation just looking at their bottom line and not thinking about the people that can't afford access to the internet", is what he had to say about the whole situation. As for Ms. Katherine Messier, the managing director of Mobile Beacon, she says her organization is not asking for any favors, but just claiming what is rightfully theirs. According to her, "We're not asking for special treatment, but we're asking that they get the same treatment and that they're not getting a lower class of service and put into the slow lane in another fashion".

The non-profits now want Sprint to hook them up to the carrier's LTE network on the terms previously agreed upon as part of the original contract, if indeed the carrier decides to bring down the curtains on

its WiMAX network. However, till such time as the migration is completed in a smooth manner, they are seeking an injunction from the judiciary to have Sprint running the WiMAX network to the best of its ability. A Sprint spokesperson declined to get into the specifics of the dispute citing confidentiality, but did go on record admitting an ongoing tussle with the plaintiffs regarding certain clauses in the contract.