

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of
Vernon Watson
Licensee of Station WBQP-CA
Gulf Breeze, Florida
Facility I.D. No. 69993
NAL/Acct. No. 201241420014
FRN: 0003789047

NOTICE OF APPARENT
LIABILITY FOR FORFEITURE

Adopted: November 27, 2012

Released: November 28, 2012

By the Chief, Video Division, Media Bureau:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In this Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture ("NAL"), we find that Vernon Watson (the "Licensee"), licensee of Class A television station WBQP-CA, Gulf Breeze, Florida (the "Station"), apparently willfully and repeatedly violated Section 73.3526(e)(11)(iii) of the Rules, by failing to file with the Commission the Station's Children's Television Programming Reports. Based upon our review of the facts and circumstances before us, we conclude that the Licensee is apparently liable for a monetary forfeiture in the amount of three thousand dollars (\$3,000).

II. BACKGROUND

2. Section 73.3526 of the Rules requires each commercial broadcast licensee to maintain a public inspection file containing specific types of information related to station operations. As set forth in subsection 73.3526(e)(11)(iii), each commercial television licensee is required to prepare and place in its public inspection file a Children's Television Programming Report (FCC Form 398) for each calendar quarter reflecting, inter alia, the efforts that it made during that quarter to serve the educational and informational needs of children. That subsection also requires licensees to file the reports with the Commission and to publicize for the public the existence and location of the reports. Where lapses occur in maintaining the public file, neither the negligent acts nor omissions of station employees or agents, nor the subsequent remedial actions undertaken by the licensee, excuse or nullify the licensee's rule violation.

3. On March 24, 2011, the Deputy Chief, Video Division, Media Bureau, issued a letter to

1 This NAL is issued pursuant to Section 503(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the "Act"), and Section 1.80 of the Commission's Rules (the "Rules"). See 47 U.S.C. § 503(b); 47 C.F.R. § 1.80. The Chief, Video Division, Media Bureau, has delegated authority to issue the NAL under Sections 0.61 0.283 of the Rules. See 47 C.F.R. §§ 061, 0.283.

2 See 47 C.F.R. § 73.3526(e)(11)(iii).

3 47 C.F.R. § 73.3526.

4 See Padre Serra Communications, Inc., 14 FCC Rcd 9709 (MMB 1999) (citing Gaffney Broadcasting, Inc., 23 FCC 2d 912, 913 (1970) and Eleven Ten Broadcasting Corp., 33 FCC 706 (1962)); Surrey Front Range Limited Partnership, 7 FCC Rcd 6361 (FOB 1992).

the Licensee (“Letter”), stating that Commission records indicated that the Licensee failed to make the required Form 398 electronic filings for WBQP-CA for the third and fourth quarters in 2009 and for all four quarters in 2010. The Letter required the Licensee to provide information, supported by the declaration of a person with personal knowledge,⁵ identifying the quarters in 2009 and 2010 for which a Children’s Television Programming Report was prepared and placed in the Station’s public inspection file and the location of the file. The Letter further required that this information be filed within 30 days and stated that failure to provide the requested information, or to notify the staff that the Licensee was electing to let the Station revert to low power television status, could result in the institution of a forfeiture proceeding and/or loss of Class A television status. On August 3, 2011, the Deputy Chief, Video Division issued a second letter to the Licensee, repeating that the Licensee had failed to make the required Form 398 electronic filings for WBQP-CA and that failure to provide the information required within 30 days could result in a change in the station’s status from Class A television to low power television status.

5. On February 29, 2012, the Video Division received the Licensee’s response to its inquiries. The Licensee advised the Commission that all of the missing reports had been completed and placed in the Station’s public file at the appropriate times. While the Licensee acknowledged that the reports were not in Commission’s on-line filing database, the Licensee could not explain why the reports were missing. The Licensee, upon learning of its failure to file the Children’s Television Program Reports for 2009 and 2010, reexamined the Commission’s on-line filing system and correctly filed the missing reports with the Commission.

III. DISCUSSION

6. The Licensee’s failure to file the Children’s Television Programming Reports for WBQP-CA, Gulf Breeze, Florida with the Commission constitutes an apparent willful and repeated violation of Section 73.3526(e)(11)(iii). Although the violations apparently resulted from inadvertence, the Commission has repeatedly rejected human error and inadvertence as a basis for excusing a licensee’s rule violation.⁶ Furthermore, corrective actions may have been taken to prevent subsequent violations of the children’s television rules and policies, but that too, does not relieve the Licensee of liability for the violations which have occurred.⁷

7. This *NAL* is issued pursuant to Section 503(b)(1)(B) of the Act. Under that provision, any person who is determined by the Commission to have willfully or repeatedly failed to comply with any provision of the Act or any rule, regulation, or order issued by the Commission shall be liable to the United States for a forfeiture penalty.⁸ Section 312(f)(1) of the Act defines willful as “the conscious and deliberate commission or omission of [any] act, irrespective of any intent to violate” the law.⁹ The legislative history to Section 312(f)(1) of the Act clarifies that this definition of willful applies to both Sections 312 and 503(b) of the Act,¹⁰ and the Commission has so interpreted the term in the Section

⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 1.16.

⁶ See *PJB Communications of Virginia, Inc.*, 7 FCC Rcd 2088 (1992); *Southern California Broadcasting Co.*, 6 FCC Rcd 4387, 4387 (1991), *recon. denied*, 7 FCC Rcd 3454 (1992) (“Inadvertence ... is at best, ignorance of the law, which the Commission does not consider a mitigating circumstance.”); *Standard Communications Corp.*, 1 FCC Rcd 358 (1986) (“Employee acts or omissions, such as clerical errors in failing to file required forms, do not excuse violations.”)

⁷ See, e.g., *Sage Broadcasting Corporation*, 23 FCC Rcd 8160, 8162 (Vid. Div. 2008); *HP Television, L.P.*, 10 FCC Rcd 4979, 4980 (MMB 1995); *Mountain States Broadcasting, Inc.*, 9 FCC Rcd 2545, 2546 (MMB 1994).

⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 503(b)(1)(B); see also 47 C.F.R. § 1.80(a)(1).

⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 312(f)(1).

¹⁰ See H.R. Rep. No. 97-765, 97th Cong. 2d Sess. 51 (1982).

503(b) context.¹¹ Section 312(f)(2) of the Act provides that “[t]he term ‘repeated,’ when used with reference to the commission or omission of any act, means the commission or omission of such act more than once or, if such commission or omission is continuous, for more than one day.”¹²

8. The Commission’s *Forfeiture Policy Statement* and Section 1.80(b)(4) of the Rules establish a base forfeiture amount of \$3,000 for failure to file a required form.¹³ In determining the appropriate forfeiture amount, we may adjust the base amount upward or downward by considering the factors enumerated in Section 503(b)(2)(D) of the Act, including “the nature, circumstances, extent and gravity of the violation, and, with respect to the violator, the degree of culpability, any history of prior offenses, ability to pay, and such other matters as justice may require.”¹⁴

9. In this case, the Licensee acknowledges that it failed to file with the Commission Children’s Television Programming Reports for the third and fourth quarters of 2009 and for all four quarters in 2010. Based on the record before us, we believe that a forfeiture in the amount of \$3,000 is appropriate for the Licensee’s apparent willful and repeated violations of Section 73.3526(e)(11)(iii).

IV. ORDERING CLAUSES

10. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED, pursuant to Section 503(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and Section 1.80 of the Commission’s Rules, that Vernon Watson is hereby NOTIFIED of his APPARENT LIABILITY FOR FORFEITURE in the amount of three thousand dollars (\$3,000) for his apparent willful and repeated violations of Section 73.3526 of the Commission’s Rules.

11. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, pursuant to Section 1.80 of the Commission’s Rules, that, within thirty (30) days of the release date of this *NAL*, the Licensee SHALL PAY the full amount of the proposed forfeiture or SHALL FILE a written statement seeking reduction or cancellation of the proposed forfeiture.

12. Payment of the proposed forfeiture must be made by check or similar instrument, payable to the order of the Federal Communications Commission. The payment must include the *NAL*/Acct. No. and FRN No. referenced in the caption above. Payment by check or money order may be mailed to Federal Communications Commission at P.O. Box 979088, St. Louis, MO 63197-9000. Payment by overnight mail may be sent to U.S. Bank-Government Lockbox #979088, SL-MO-C2-GL, 1005 Convention Plaza, St. Louis, MO 63101. Payment by wire transfer may be made to ABA Number 021030004, receiving bank: TREAS NYC, BNF: FCC/ACV--27000001 and account number as expressed on the remittance instrument. If completing the FCC Form 159, enter the *NAL*/Account number in block number 23A (call sign/other ID), and enter the letters “FORF” in block number 24A (payment type code). Licensee must also send electronic notification on the date said payment is made to adrienne.denysyk@fcc.gov.

13. The response, if any, must be mailed to Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, ATTN: Barbara A. Kreisman, Chief, Video Division, Media Bureau, and MUST INCLUDE the *NAL*/Acct. No. referenced above.

¹¹ See *Southern California Broadcasting Co.*, 6 FCC Rcd at 4388.

¹² 47 U.S.C. § 312(f)(2).

¹³ See *Forfeiture Policy Statement and Amendment of Section 1.80(b) of the Rules to Incorporate the Forfeiture Guidelines*, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 17087, 17113-15 (1997) (“*Forfeiture Policy Statement*”), recon. denied, 15 FCC Rcd 303 (1999); 47 C.F.R. § 1.80(b)(4), note to paragraph (b)(4), Section I.

¹⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 503(b)(2)(D); see also *Forfeiture Policy Statement*, 12 FCC Rcd at 17100-01; 47 C.F.R. § 1.80(b)(4) and note to paragraph (b)(4), Section II.

14. The Commission will not consider reducing or canceling a forfeiture in response to a claim of inability to pay unless the respondent submits: (1) federal tax returns for the most recent three-year period; (2) financial statements prepared according to generally accepted accounting practices (“GAAP”); or (3) some other reliable and objective documentation that accurately reflects the respondent’s current financial status. Any claim of inability to pay must specifically identify the basis for the claim by reference to the financial documentation submitted.

15. Requests for full payment of the forfeiture proposed in this *NAL* under the installment plan should be sent to: Associate Managing Director- Financial Operations, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room 1-A625, Washington, D.C. 20554.¹⁵

16. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that copies of this *NAL* shall be sent, by First Class and Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, to Vernon Watson, 312 East Nine Mile Road, Suite 29D, Pensacola, FL 32514.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Barbara A. Kreisman
Chief, Video Division
Media Bureau

¹⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 1.1914.