



Know Your Telephone Rights



You have the right to receive quality service. All companies providing local or long-distance service (except wireless and Internet-based companies) must meet Ohio's Minimum Telephone Service Standards (MTSS) and other consumer protection standards.

These regulations include how long companies are allowed to take to restore service and what action can be taken if your bill is not paid on time. The following are examples of important rights that you should know.

Installation

Local telephone companies are required to provide service within five business days of your request. If service is not established within five business days, you are entitled to be credited one-half the installation charge. If service is not established within 10 business days, the full installation charge must be credited. You also can receive credits for missed installation appointments and commitments.

A company may charge an installation or service connection fee and you have the right to be billed for this charge in three monthly installments. These fees vary among companies.

Deposits

A local telephone company may require a deposit if you have not previously established credit or do not pay your bill on time. Generally, the amount of the deposit cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one month's local service. For example, if service is estimated to cost you \$35 per month, a deposit of up to \$80.50 may be collected. The company is required to refund the deposit plus interest as long as you do not pay late more than twice over 12 consecutive months.

Features

Companies may offer you packages that bundle basic service with features, such as call waiting and three-way calling, for a charge that is higher than the price of basic local service. In most cases, you also may purchase features separately from the package.

Be sure to consider the long-term affordability of your telephone bill. When adding features to your telephone line or subscribing to bundled packages, realize you can be disconnected from all services if you do not pay your entire bill each month.

Blocking

You have the right to block access to 900 services, collect calls, third-party calls and pay-per-use calls at no charge through the local telephone company. However, companies may charge you to block the ability to make long-distance calls.

Slamming

You have the right to choose a long-distance company of your choice. You also may have choices for local telephone service. "Slamming" is switching you to a company without your permission and is illegal.

Billing

Telephone companies must give you at least 14 days to pay monthly bills. If payment is not made on time, late fees may apply. If a partial payment is made, that amount may be applied to the local portion of your bill first, however, this is not required.

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Disconnection

Your local service may be disconnected for nonpayment of any part of your bill.

If you are facing disconnection, a telephone company must send you a notice at least seven days in advance of the shut-off date. The notice must include the amount owed in local charges and a due date to avoid shutoff. You can avoid disconnection by paying all charges or establishing by a payment plan with the company.

If local service is disconnected, you might not be able to keep your current telephone number.

Reconnection

You have the right to be reconnected once all past due charges are paid. A deposit and a reconnection charge may be required to reconnect service.

Repairs & Appointments

Generally, local telephone companies are responsible for the outside lines leading to your home. You are responsible for maintaining the wiring inside your home.

Local telephone companies are required to provide you the time, within a four-hour window, during which an outside repair will be made. If a local telephone company misses an appointment or the four-hour window, you are usually entitled to receive credit for one-half of one month's regulated local charges for the service(s) that cannot be used.

If you live in a home where a medical or life-threatening condition exists and you have notified the telephone company in writing of this, telephone companies are required to prioritize your repairs. You can contact the company at any time to find out how to be placed on a priority list.

Customer Complaints

Telephone companies must resolve complaints within 10 business days or provide you a status report explaining what needs to be done and when the resolution is expected. The status report can be in writing or over the telephone.

Out of Service

It is important to inform your telephone provider of an outage as soon as possible. If you have an outage for longer than 72 hours from the time you report the outage, you are entitled to a credit for the cost of one month's local regulated charges.

Who to Call

If you have questions about your telephone service or your rights as a consumer, you may call the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) toll free at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622). The OCC also has other fact sheets available on issues such as telephone disconnection and reconnection, slamming, cramming and monthly charges.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:

Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574
Write: 10 West Broad Street, 18th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3485
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