



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

Janine L. Migden-Ostrander
Consumers' Counsel

Dec. 4, 2009

To the Editor:

Legislation being considered by the Ohio General Assembly will likely raise telephone rates and significantly reduce consumer protections. Ohioans across the state deserve fair, competitive and reasonably priced telephone service. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) opposes Senate Bill 162 and House Bill 276, legislation backed by the telephone industry that would deregulate basic telephone service and have significant negative consequences for Ohioans across the state.

The proposed legislation:

Allows rate increases, even in areas where there is only one provider offering landline telephone service. Consumers could face increases of up to 20-40 percent over the next few years.

Weakens or removes consumer protections by replacing the Minimum Telephone Service Standards, a set of rules and consumer protections, with weaker laws.

Lowers service quality standards. For example, the time telephone companies have to restore an out-of-service telephone line will increase from 24 to 72 hours. This puts consumers at risk and leads to a deterioration in service quality. A decreased need for a phone line repair workforce may mean job cuts.

Fails to protect consumers who have bundled telecommunications services. Customers who subscribe to a package of services do not receive minimal safeguards. For example, there is no time requirement for companies to install bundles, restore outages or reconnect a customer who has been disconnected for non-payment. There also is no limit on the deposit the telephone company could charge to initiate telephone services.

In addition, telephone companies are currently required to provide access to 9-1-1 emergency services for 14 days following any customers' disconnection for nonpayment. Under the legislation, this requirement would be eliminated for customers with packages or bundles, which could put customers' health and safety at risk.

Bundled customers would have only limited protections from "unfair or deceptive" practices.

Fails to provide broadband access to all Ohioans. Expanding consumer's access to broadband is important for economic development and job creation. Ohioans need the ability to receive telephone and Internet service over a high-speed connection.

The OCC urges consumers to contact their legislators immediately and let them know the importance of maintaining basic consumer protections over Ohio's telephone services. For more information, consumers can contact the OCC at www.pickocc.org or 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622).

Sincerely,

Janine Migden-Ostrander

Janine Migden-Ostrander, Consumers' Counsel
Columbus

Word count: 366