



Resolution

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel Governing Board

In Support of Preserving Affordable Basic Local Telephone Service with Adequate Quality for Ohioans

- WHEREAS,** Electricity, natural gas, telephone, and water services are essential for Ohioans; and
- WHEREAS,** In 2013, when the telephone industry was seeking legislation that would have adversely impacted the availability of basic local telephone service for consumers, the Governing Board approved a Resolution for maintaining that service "with price and quality protections for consumers..." (Resolution, June 4, 2013); and
- WHEREAS,** The telephone industry (AT&T, Ohio Telecom Association and others) is again supporting legislation to weaken protections for consumers of basic local telephone service, in Substitute House Bill 402 (the "Bill") that was introduced in the 132nd Ohio General Assembly; and
- WHEREAS,** It is the policy of the state of Ohio to ensure the availability of adequate basic local exchange service or voice service to citizens throughout the state; and
- WHEREAS,** Ohio law appropriately requires local telephone companies to provide basic local telephone service, on a reasonable and nondiscriminatory basis, to all persons in their service areas who request basic local telephone service; and
- WHEREAS,** Basic local telephone service is an essential service to thousands of Ohioans, especially for elderly, low-income, and rural consumers who do not have affordable alternatives for the basic local telephone service offered by their telephone company; and
- WHEREAS,** Basic local telephone service should provide residential consumers with unlimited local calling at an affordable flat rate with enforceable standards for service quality; and
- WHEREAS,** All residential consumers should have access to 9-1-1 emergency communications, particularly in areas where cellular services are inadequate; and
- WHEREAS,** Substitute House Bill 402 would allow local telephone companies to increase monthly charges to residential and small business consumers for basic local telephone service by two dollars every year, a significant increase over the annual rate increase (\$1.25) currently allowed by law; and
- WHEREAS,** Substitute House Bill 402 could remove, in four years, any limit on increases in monthly charges to residential and small business consumers for basic local telephone service, based on a standard that telephone companies could already meet in most areas of Ohio if Ohio lawmakers take no action to limit monthly charges to customers after a status report by the PUCO is submitted to the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, The allowance of significant rate increases (and other reductions in consumer protection) through Substitute House Bill 402 could harm consumers of basic local telephone service; and

WHEREAS, In the Ohio House of Representatives the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel testified jointly with the Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, HARCATUS Tri-County Community Action, Ohio Poverty Law Center, and Pro Seniors in opposition to Substitute House Bill 402 – and AARP and Southeastern Ohio Legal Services separately testified to their concerns about the Bill – to recommend that legislators protect basic local telephone service consumers by preserving the existing limits on price increases and enforceable standards for service quality.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel supports the availability of affordable, reasonably priced basic local telephone service with enforceable standards for adequate service quality for residential consumers throughout Ohio.

AND THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel opposes the enactment of Substitute House Bill 402 as being contrary to the public's interest in the availability of affordable, reasonably priced basic local telephone service for residential consumers throughout Ohio.

I verify that this Resolution has been approved by the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, this 15th day of May 2018.



Michael Watkins, Chairman
Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel