



STATE OF CONNECTICUT NEWS RELEASE

Consumer Counsel Mary J. Healey

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OCC Requests The DPUC Regulate Video Provision By Phone Companies To Avoid Redlining And Access Discrimination

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) filed comments on August 23, 2005 with the Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) requesting that potential video offerings by the Connecticut's two local exchange companies (LECs) be regulated in order to ensure Connecticut residents are not provided inferior services. The OCC stated that while cable television operators are lightly regulated, they provide important community benefits, do not redline economic areas, and provide customers with open access to programming. The OCC's comments pointed out that the playing field for video services should be level among all providers, without discrimination based on the technology used.

While acknowledging that regulations relating to LEC video should change to keep pace with evolving delivery technology, the OCC specifically cited comments made by SBC before Congress that it intended to roll out video services in high value areas to the exclusion of economically unattractive potential customers. Consumer Counsel Mary J. Healey responded to these comments by saying, "My office's mission is to advocate for all Connecticut utility consumers and accordingly we will act to ensure nondiscriminatory roll out of SBC's IPTV services."

Also, in order to assure access to varied program content, the OCC is requesting the DPUC to address the following issues:

- open access to all video services to all residents regardless of income;
- a requirement to carry local broadcast channels;
- carriage of community access channels;
- protection of subscriber privacy;
- compliance with consumer protection obligations; and
- carriage of emergency broadcast information.

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The OCC stated that regulating LEC provision of video services on a par with cable television operators will not deter or slow the rollout of LEC services, but instead will provide vital public policy protections that will enhance the offerings and make them more viable over time. The OCC detailed its belief that the safeguards it has proposed will directly benefit Connecticut residents by encouraging a fair deployment of the exciting new technologies being planned by both the telephone and cable companies.

Finally, the OCC disputes SBC's claim to be exempt from the DPUC franchise process because of the technology planned. The regulatory procedure administered by the DPUC includes, among other things, oversight by the DPUC of customer service, community access programming, and extension of infrastructure throughout the franchise territory. Verizon, in contrast, agrees that its video provision will be subject to the franchise process.

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