

BEFORE

THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

In the Matter of the Commission's Review of)	
Chapters 4901:1-17 and 4901:1-18 and Rules)	Case No. 08-723-AU-ORD
4901:1-13-11, 4901:1-15-17, 4901:1-21-14,)	
and 4901:1-29-12 of the Ohio Administrative)	
Code)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF THE OHIO TELECOM ASSOCIATION

The OHIO TELECOM ASSOCIATION, for and on behalf of its members ("OTA"), hereby submits its Reply Comments in this matter. The OTA directs its reply comments to the initial comments filed in this case by the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, The Appalachian People's Action Coalition, The Cleveland Housing Network, Empowerment Center of Great Cleveland, The Neighborhood Environmental Coalition, Consumers for Fair Utility Rates, United Clevelanders Against Poverty, Support to Encourage Low-Income Families, Cleveland Tenants' Association, Citizens United for Action, May Dugan Center, Pro-Seniors, Harcatus Tri-County Community Action Organization, Ohio Interfaith Power and Light, The Ohio Farm Bureau Federation, The Ohio Farmers' Union, and the Edgemont Neighborhood Coalition ("Consumers' Groups").

Rule 4901:1-5-07, Customer Bills

On one hand, the Consumer Groups applaud the recommendation of the Staff to eliminate payment opportunities at legitimate businesses now characterized as "payday lenders," while at the same time the Consumer Groups suggest their replacement with newly-built "company owned payment centers." Consumers' Groups Comments at 58-59. As OTA observed in its initial comments, however, "payday lenders" are lawful legitimate businesses that serve a need. OTA Comments at 1-3. Telecommunications companies have established relationships with a variety of agents throughout the communities they serve, which allow customers to make direct payments

conveniently; these agents may or may not be payday lenders and may or may not be located in a payday lender's facility. Whatever their status, telephone companies have been providing these agents for many years without any customer complaints. Like the Staff, the Consumers' Groups provide no justification for eliminating these beneficial options for customers, and certainly none for requiring telephone companies to construct new company-owned payment agencies.

Additionally, the Consumers' Groups propose that utilities absorb fees associated with certain electronic transactions, credit card payments, and other vendor services, Consumer Groups Comments at 58-59, and the OTA objects. Companies have created many options for customers to pay their bills, some of which would not be offered if the utility were required to absorb all costs. Limiting fees would simply limit choices for consumers. Further, such proposals ignore the current market for telecommunications services, in which unregulated competitors are not required to have physical payment locations or limit fees. The payment options for both regulated carriers and their competitors have evolved into efficient choices that meet customer demands. The Consumers' Group has presented no evidence that the current system does not serve customers, and thus their proposals must be rejected.

Rule 4901:1-17-03(A)(4)

With the Staff, the Consumers' Groups inserted two additional sentences in to this Rule: "Customers shall be given the option to pay a cash deposit over a period of at least three months. Cash deposits cannot be required of Lifeline, Link-Up, or PIPP customers." Consumers' Groups Comments at 66. The OTA objects because deposits for telephone service, otherwise determined by Rule 4901:1-5-05, are designed to cover an average two months service in the event that a customer cannot pay. It would make little sense to allow any deposit to be paid over time, especially over a period longer than the time used to calculate the deposit amount. To allow time to pay a deposit defeats the purpose of a deposit.

Rule 4901:1-17-04(A) & (B)

The OTA has two concerns with these Comments of the Consumers' Groups.

First, in the context of re-establishing credit, a subscriber should not determine which method to use. Rather, the selection should be that of the telephone company.

Second, a guarantor option for telephone service is not required by statute, and rule-based requirements for them have not been well accepted, with few customers accepting the option. To avoid unnecessary programming and process costs, any guaranty option should be at the telephone company's discretion.

Rule 4901-1-17-05(A)

With this Rule, the Office of the Ohio Consumers' counsel again asks for the inclusion of its contact information with deposit information. The OTA submits this request should be denied. Such information is already incorporated by the companies into regulated telephone customer bills, notices and directories. Another repetition is unnecessary, especially because it is not required of unregulated competitors such as cable companies and wireless companies.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, and for those set forth in its initial Comments, the Ohio Telecom Association submits that its recommendations should be adopted.

Respectfully submitted,

OHIO TELECOM ASSOCIATION

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Summary: Reply Reply Comments of the Ohio Telecom Association electronically filed by Mr. Thomas E Lodge on behalf of Ohio Telecom Association