

FCC Consumer Advisory

When Your Telephone Company Discontinues Service or Files for Bankruptcy

Domestic carriers, which include traditional wireline telephone companies and some cable companies that provide telephone service, must follow rules adopted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) if they plan to discontinue, reduce or impair telephone service for any reason, including bankruptcy. The purpose of the rules is to protect customers from abrupt changes to or termination of telephone service from one carrier without an opportunity to arrange service with another provider.

In some cases, even if a carrier files for bankruptcy, it will continue to provide service. The carrier may even be able to emerge from bankruptcy and continue serving its customers for many years.

The FCC's rules for discontinuing, reducing or impairing service require carriers to:

- provide written notice to affected customers of any planned discontinuance, reduction or impairment of service, stating that customers have the right to file comments with the FCC;
- after notifying affected customers, request permission from the FCC to discontinue, reduce or impair service; and
- continue providing service for a minimum of 31 days after the FCC releases a Public Notice announcing the request to discontinue, reduce or impair service and seeking comment on the proposed discontinuance, reduction or impairment.

The FCC can extend the termination date. For international telephone service, carriers must provide their customers 60 days' notice before discontinuing, reducing or impairing service. The carrier must also file a copy of the notice with the FCC on or after the date affected customers are notified.

If you object to a carrier's plan to discontinue, reduce or impair service, you can file your objections or other comments with the FCC in response to its Public Notice announcing the proposed discontinuance, reduction or impairment. The Public Notice will state the applicable deadline and procedures for filing such comments. The FCC will consider your objections or other comments when evaluating the carrier's request to discontinue, reduce or impair its service. The FCC usually will authorize a carrier's request to discontinue, reduce or impair service unless the carrier's customers are unable to receive similar services or a reasonable substitute from another provider.

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Customer Transfers

Sometimes during bankruptcy or for other business reasons, a carrier may sell or transfer its customer base to another company. FCC rules establish several protections for consumers in such cases. The rules state that:

- the acquiring company must provide customers 30 days advance notice of the transfer, including information about its rates and services; and
- customers may accept the acquiring company or choose another company.

Customers who are transferred to an acquiring company without adequate notice are entitled to relief under the FCC's slamming rules. For more information about these rules or to file a complaint about being slammed, visit the slamming page of the FCC's Web site at www.fcc.gov/slamming.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have a complaint (other than a slamming complaint) about a carrier discontinuing, reducing, or impairing service, you can file it with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint. You can file your complaint using an on-line complaint form found at esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm. You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to complete fully the on-line complaint form. When you open the on-line complaint form, you will be asked a series of questions that will take you to the particular section of the form you need to complete. If you do not use the on-line complaint form, your complaint, at a minimum, should indicate:

- name, address, e-mail address, and phone number where you can be reached;
- telephone and account numbers that are the subject of your complaint;
- names and phone numbers of any companies involved with your complaint;
- if applicable, the amount of any disputed charges, whether you paid them, whether you received a refund or adjustment to your bill, the amount of any adjustment or refund you have received, an explanation if the disputed charges are related to services in addition to residence or business telephone services; and
- the details of your complaint and any additional relevant information.

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What About Discontinuance of Telephone Service from a Wireless or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Company?

The FCC has not adopted specific rules for wireless or VoIP providers that discontinue, reduce or impair service. Procedures for discontinuance, reduction or impairment of service may be stated in your contract for service with these types of providers. If a wireless or VoIP provider discontinues, reduces or impairs your service without cause or notice in a manner that leaves you without alternative telephone service, you can file a complaint with the FCC as described above. State laws may offer additional protections. Therefore, you may also want to contact your state public utility commission or consumer protection agency. Contact information for state public utility commissions can be found on the Internet at www.naruc.org/commissions.cfm or in the government section or blue pages of your local telephone directory.

For More Information

For more information about FCC rules governing discontinuance, reduction, or impairment of telephone service or any other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.

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For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio) please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an e-mail to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

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