

## **Telephone network transition in Ohio**

### **Consumers are not losing basic landline service (or BLES) today**

Legislation enacted in 2015 by the Ohio General Assembly permits an incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC) to discontinue offering traditional basic local exchange service (BLES) if it receives permission from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The law contains a process meant to assist residential basic local exchange service customers in finding a reasonable and comparatively priced alternative to basic local exchange service.

Basic local exchange service is a single, flat-rate telephone line without additional features, such as Caller ID, Call Forwarding and Call Waiting. It is distinct from service bundles, which may include telephone features, video services and/or internet access. Telephone companies may withdraw bundled services at any time, simply by notifying customers and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). Withdrawal of basic local exchange service requires a different process.

Incumbent local exchange carriers in Ohio are not presently seeking to discontinue, withdraw or abandon basic local exchange service. Ohio's telecommunication industry is transitioning to new and advanced technologies which many Ohio consumers already have and continue to adopt.

### **Before an ILEC can cease offering BLES**

Prior to an ILEC withdrawing BLES, the FCC must grant the ILEC permission to withdraw the portion of local exchange service under the FCC's jurisdiction (access to long distance networks). As a part of this process, the ILEC must notify affected customers about its pending request and that the affected customer has the right to file an objection or other comments with the FCC. The FCC is reviewing these processes as part of its continuing oversight of the national technology transitions.

For more information on the FCC's efforts see:

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/tech-transition>;

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/when-your-telephone-company-discontinues-service>

## **At the time an ILEC wishes to withdraw BLES**

The new Ohio law states the following:

- The ILEC cannot withdraw or abandon BLES for at least 120 days after notifying affected customers and the PUCO.
- Any affected residential BLES customer who receives notice from the ILEC and is unable to obtain reasonable and comparatively priced voice service may file a petition with the PUCO not later than 90 days prior to the effective date of the withdrawal.
- A residential BLES customer identified by the collaborative as unable to obtain reasonable and comparatively priced alternative voice service shall be treated as if the customer had filed a timely petition.
- The PUCO will conduct an investigation to determine if reasonable and comparatively priced voice service will be available to the affected customer, identified by petition filed or through the collaborative process, at the customer's residence.
- If the PUCO investigation determines that no reasonable and comparatively priced voice service will be available, the PUCO will attempt to identify a willing provider of a reasonable and comparatively priced voice service to serve the customer at the customer's residence. The willing provider may use any technology or service arrangement.
- If no willing provider is identified, the PUCO may order the withdrawing ILEC to provide a reasonable and comparatively priced voice service — using any technology or service arrangement — to the customer at the customer's residence for at least 12 months. The PUCO may extend its order for an additional 12 months if there is still no alternative reasonable and comparatively priced voice service available to the customer. If, after the second 12-month period, there is still no alternative reasonable and comparatively priced voice service available to the customer, the PUCO may order the withdrawing ILEC to continue to provide a reasonable and comparatively priced voice service to the customer at the customer's residence.

## **Telephone network transition collaborative**

The PUCO, communications industry, consumer groups and other stakeholders are working collaboratively to help customers maintain access to reasonable and comparatively priced voice service. This includes:

- Developing a collaborative coalition to guide this process
  - The PUCO has joined with the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, incumbent local exchange companies, alternative providers, members of the General Assembly and other interested parties to form a collaborative to address the telephone network transition.
- Proactively working through the collaborative process to identify residential BLES customers who might not have a reasonable and comparably priced alternative to their incumbent local exchange company's basic local exchange service.
- Providing information to the public about the transition and the collaborative process, including meeting minutes and presentations from those involved, at [www.PUCO.ohio.gov](http://www.PUCO.ohio.gov).

In order to prepare for the transition, the PUCO, along with interested parties, is working to evaluate the availability of reasonable and comparatively priced voice service, identify potentially vulnerable Ohioans and develop programs for consumer education.

**Telephone customers should stay informed and educated on the process that is taking place.**

For more information on the collaborative and to file public comments visit the PUCO's [consumer topics page](#). Customers can also call the PUCO Call Center at (800) 686-7826.