



Public Utilities Commission

John R. Kasich, Governor
Todd A. Snitchler, Chairman

Commissioners

Cheryl Roberto
Steven D. Lesser
Andre T. Porter
Lynn Slaby

November 16, 2012

Lynn Slaby, Commissioner
Public Utilities Commission of Ohio

Making a call to a distant relative, friend or business is something we have been doing for decades without thought of how the call is actually completed. In today's world, dialing long-distance numbers or making wireless telephone calls are a regular occurrences that we expect to be done without issue or interruption.

Many rural Ohio landline telephone customers no longer take the ability to make and receive telephone calls for granted, however. Rural telephone companies and their customers throughout Ohio are experiencing what has become known as "rural call completion" problems. These customers have reported a variety of call completion issues, including calls not being connected. This issue affects both long distance calls and wireless telephone calls and can be identified by one or more of the following:

- The called person's phone rings but he or she hears dead air when the call is answered;
- Extremely poor quality on answerable calls (e.g., severe echo, garbled, only one way conversation audible); and/or,
- Inaccurate or misleading caller identification display.

These problems create frustrations for rural telephone customers, many of whom are trying to place calls to or receive calls from family members or friends. Additionally, these connection problems have the potential to cause significant harm to local businesses that may experience disconnection from their suppliers or missed business opportunities from their customers.

Many rural customers understandably, yet mistakenly, place the blame for their call completion issues on their local telephone company or the local telephone company servicing the town being called. However, rather than being the fault of the local telephone company, these problems are generally caused by the route a rural call takes when transported by the network of either the caller's long distance company or wireless telephone company.

The rates that rural providers charge to other carriers for completing calls are higher than those in more urban areas. This is due to the fact that rural areas are more expensive to serve because of their lower population density. To minimize their costs, some long-distance service providers contract with third-parties to route their calls at the lowest cost possible. This practice is called "least-cost routing." It is important to note that least cost routing is not new and has actually been used for the efficient management of networks and network costs for many years. In recent years, however, the least cost routing market has become very competitive. In this market, least cost routers are constantly bidding their services at very low rates. As a result, multiple least cost routers may be involved in a call's path as one least cost router hands the call to another in an effort to minimize the cost of transporting the call. While this may be ultimately cheaper for the long distance or wireless company routing the call, it may also lead to poorer service and call quality for customers.

To address this issue, the FCC has recently adopted new rules that provide both short and long-term solutions to rural call completion problems and continues to work on this issue. Accordingly, customers of rural local telephone companies who are experiencing such problems may wish to contact the FCC at (888) 225-5322. Further information about rural call completion problems may also be found on the FCC's website at www.fcc.gov. The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) has also taken an active interest in rural call completion problems and the search for solutions. However, with available alternatives to the traditional telephone services, rural call completion problems often involve service providers that are not telecommunications service providers, such as voice over internet protocol service and internet service providers, who do not fall under the PUCO's regulatory authority. Nonetheless, in an effort to determine the magnitude of the problem in Ohio, the PUCO asks for customers to contact the PUCO Call Center at (800) 868-PUCO (7826) to report problems experienced while placing or receiving long distance and wireless calls in Ohio.

In addition to contacting the FCC and the PUCO, long distance and wireless telephone customers experiencing call completion problems should contact their respective long distance or wireless telephone service provider to open a trouble ticket. These companies should work with their customers to resolve these issues. Additionally, customers should consider contacting their local provider to let them know the problem exists.

When contacting your service provider, the FCC and the PUCO, be sure to provide the following information, which will help determine the reason for the call interruption:

- The date and time the call was placed;
- The phone number from which the call originated;
- The name of the caller's long distance provider; and,
- Details about the call, e.g., failure to connect, loss of connection, poor quality, etc.

With proper consumer reporting, we hope that these problems will be identified and solutions offered in the future.

The PUCO is the sole agency charged with regulating public utility service. The role of the PUCO is to assure all residential, business, and industrial consumers have access to adequate, safe, and reliable utility services at fair prices while facilitating an environment that provides competitive choices.