



# Public Service Commission

SERVING MARYLAND SINCE 1910

Frequently Asked Questions

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## **Telecommunication**

### **1. What services are regulated by the Public Service Commission (Commission)?**

The Commission regulates wired intrastate telephone service. The Commission does not have authority to regulate interstate or international telephone service. Also, the Commission does not regulate wireless service. Those services are regulated by the [Federal Communications Commission](#).

### **2. My telephone bill also includes charges for internet and cable; does the Public Service Commission regulate these services?**

The Commission does not have any regulatory authority over internet (broadband) service. Consumers can file a complaint concerning this service with the [Federal Communications Commission](#).

Also, the Commission does not regulate cable service. Consumers can contact the [Federal Communications Commission](#) for information. Consumers can file a complaint about cable service with the local franchise office in the county where the service is provided.

### **3. Can the Public Service Commission help me with my Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service?**

Verizon and Comcast's digital voice service is considered Voice over Internet Protocol ('VoIP'). The Commission does not have jurisdiction over the regulation of VoIP service, including the imposition of regulatory fees, certification requirements, and the filing or approval of tariffs. Section 8-602(c) of the Public Utility Companies Article ('PUC') requires that any company that moves a customer from a Commission-approved tariff service to VoIP service must notify the customer that the Commission does not have jurisdiction over VoIP service, and that complaints about VoIP service may be filed with the [Office of Attorney General](#).

**4. Where can I locate information about regulated services?**

First you should contact the telephone company about the service(s) that you are interested in obtaining from them. The telephone company will be able to explain to you which services are regulated by the Public Service Commission. In addition, you can find information about the regulated services in the utility's tariff. The tariff will contain the utility's schedule of rates and charges, the company's terms and conditions and its policies and practices in rendering service. The utility's tariff must be approved by the Commission.

**5. Are there any low income assistance programs for telephone service?**

Tel-Life is a federal program, funded by telephone customers, to help make telephone service more affordable for low-income customers. Eligible customer will receive a discount to the cost of local phone service, installation and repair. The subscriber line charge is also waived. Customers who receive government sponsored assistance (i.e., TCA, TDAP, SSI, SNAP, PAA, MEAP/EUSP) are eligible for Tel-Life. Discounts can be applied to either the landline or wireless service, but not both. For more information, or to apply, contact 1-800-525-0145.

**6. Can the utility require that I pay a deposit to start service?**

The utility may require that you pay a cash deposit as a condition for establishing service. The amount and terms of the deposit are included in the utility's tariff, which is on file with the Public Service Commission.

**7. What information is to be included on my bill?**

The utility bill must contain a clear listing of all charges and credits, including the charges for the regulated service, plus all applicable federal and local taxes. In addition, all toll calls placed before the billing date and other charges and credits with appropriate explanation are to be included on the bill. Lastly, the amount of the balance due carried forward from the prior bill, the total amount of the bill, and the date by which you must pay the bill in order to avoid late charges all must be on the bill form.

**8. How much notice is my utility required to provide me before terminating service for nonpayment of a bill?**

The utility is required to give you at least five (5) days written notice (excluding Sundays and holidays) prior to disconnecting telephone service for nonpayment of a bill.

**9. Is my utility required to adjust my bill when my telephone is not working?**

If your telephone stops working, you must first report the problem to the utility so that they can issue a trouble ticket and begin working on the problem. Following notification by the customer, the utility is required to issue an adjustment to the customer's bill for a telephone out of service longer than 24 hours, per its tariff.

**10. My telephone service was switched to another company without my authorization; can you help me?**

*Slamming* is the term used to describe when a telephone subscriber's local and/or long distance service provider is changed without the person's knowledge or consent. If your service has been changed without your authority, you should first file your dispute with the company that switched your service. The company is required by law to investigate your dispute. You should also contact your telephone company and ask that they switch you back without a fee since you were slammed. If you still need assistance, then you can file a [complaint](#) with the Commission's Office of External Relations.

**11. My telephone company is discontinuing all service in Maryland; are they required to give me notice?**

A utility that provides local residential or business telephone service must provide 30 days written notice to the Commission and the affected customers if they intend on discontinuing service. The notice is to include:

- a. The date of service discontinuance, reduction, or impairment;
- b. A telephone number for customer assistance from the utility;
- c. A statement that the customer is required to select a new local service provider before the date of service termination; and
- d. A description of the process for a customer to choose another utility.

**12. I am told that my telephone service will be provided by a new company, is the new company required to provide me notice?**

The utility that acquires customers of another utility is also required to provide notice. The notice from the acquiring utility shall include:

- a. The name of the acquiring utility;
- b. The date the acquiring utility will provide service;
- c. The rates, terms, and conditions of service to be provided by the acquiring utility and a description of the means by which the acquiring utility shall notify the customer of any change to rates, terms, and conditions;

- d. A statement that the acquiring utility shall be solely responsible for any charges associated with the migration of the customer to the acquiring utility's network;
- e. A statement explaining that the customer may choose a utility other than the acquiring utility;
- f. A description of the process to choose another utility; and
- g. A telephone number for customer assistance from the utility and the acquiring utility.

**13. What are my rights if I decide that I do not want to have service with the acquiring company?**

You do not have to switch service to the acquired utility. The acquired utility cannot impose a penalty on you for switching service to another utility for a period of 90 days after acquisition. However, if you switch service after 90 days, then they can impose a penalty or charge to you for switching service.

In addition, an acquired customer decides to switch to a different utility other than the acquiring utility, the acquiring utility is required to port the telephone number to the customer's utility of choice within 48 hours of the receipt of a valid local service request.

**14. Can the Public Service Commission help me with my Broadband or Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service, which includes the digital voice provided by Verizon and Comcast?**

Verizon and Comcast's digital voice service is considered Voice over Internet Protocol ('VoIP'). The Commission does not have jurisdiction over the regulation of VoIP service, including the imposition of regulatory fees, certification requirements, and the filing or approval of tariffs. Section 8-602(c) of the Public Utility Companies Article ('PUC') requires that any company that moves a customer from a Commission-approved tariff service to VoIP service must notify the customer that the Commission does not have jurisdiction over VoIP service, and that complaints about VoIP service may be filed with the [Office of Attorney General](#).

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