

Energy and Technology Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-545

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SATISFACTION OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS
QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND PROHIBITING REMOTE

Title: RECONNECTION FEES.

Vote Date: 3/13/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/4/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Energy and Technology Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

[Sen. Bob Duff, 25th Dist.](#)

[Rep. Craig C. Fishbein, 90th Dist.](#)

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill will require the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to adopt and enforce quality of service standards concerning telephone services and prohibit the collection of fees for remote reconnection of telecommunications services, ensuring compliance with federal obligations under 47 USC 251. Many residents in the state of Connecticut do not have access to reliable telephone services. This can be because of their location, service provider, economic status, age, or physical condition, etc. Residents who are unable to pay for their telephone services may have a temporary disconnection to their telephone service. Currently, telecommunication providers can charge fees for remote reconnection services after a service has been temporarily disconnected, which is an economic burden for customers who temporarily lose their service. This bill prohibits such remote reconnection fees from being collected. Telecommunication companies can still require customers to settle their balance before service restoration, but it does not apply to residents with disabilities and/or residents above the age of sixty. By ensuring that all Connecticut residents are provided reliable telephone services through requiring that PURA enforces better quality standards, unnecessary fees for residents, especially for those who are already facing economic burdens, can be avoided. This bill will promote reliable telecommunications services for the

most vulnerable populations in Connecticut and end the fees from providers on their consumers who lose their service for a temporary amount of time.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Claire E. Coleman, the Office of the Consumer Counsel (OCC): The OCC supports **SB-00545** because it clarifies and expands important protection for telecommunication customers. It ensures that Voice over Internet Protocol ("VOIP") services are included in quality-of-services standard reporting requirements, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) and the OCC. It will allow these agencies to accurately assess whether reliable phone service is being provided to residents of Connecticut, which can fall under the radar. Prohibiting remote reconnection fees prevents arbitrary and predatory billing practices. The OCC recommends an improvement of the quality-of-service reporting provisions and a new remote reconnection fee prohibition.

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP): DEEP Supports **SB-00545** because it will extend existing quality of service and accountability requirements for modern day equivalent telephone service, which is the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP). It is becoming a landline choice which will offer customers of this service the same protections that customers of Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS) networks have benefitted from for years. It will address identify service deficiencies before they escalate into systematic issues that may cause harm for consumers. This identification will promote fairness, transparency, and accountability which are vital in this industry and in a consumer's daily life. The bill additionally strengthens public safety and economic stability, whilst enhancing consumer confidence in telecommunication services.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Bob Duff, State Senator Majority Leader of the State of Connecticut: Senator Bob Duff supports **SB-00545** because it will protect seniors and residents in rural areas of Connecticut where there are unreliable telecommunication services. It will assist seniors and residents who rely on landlines more than internet services, and where cellular services are less reliable. In the past, companies have not provided certain quality of service standards. The Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) and the Office of the Consumer Counsel (OCC) have received limited or no information in these reports. This requires that PURA and OCC receive semiannual reports. The bill also supports the growth of the "Voice over Internet Protocol" (VoIP) services in Connecticut, which allows users to make phone calls with the internet rather than using traditional landlines. It also prohibits the collection of fees for remote reconnection of telecommunications services.

John Erlingheuser, Senior Director of Advocacy at AARP of Connecticut: AARP of Connecticut supports **SB-00545** because the bill will direct PURA to consult with the Office of the Consumer Counsel (OCC), who acts as an advocate for customers, on the service quality reports. This bill would prohibit the collection of fees for a remote reconnection, no matter the reason for the disconnection. The older adults in Connecticut rely on adequate service quality, especially landlines, and they are less likely to adopt high-speed internet access compared to younger individuals. Without the proper restoration of dial tone lines when out of

service, which are not repaired in a timely manner, the health and safety of resident, may be jeopardized, especially when there is no other alternative that is reliable to reach emergency lines such as 9-1-1. This bill would take care of the senior citizens who rely on landlines and those who live in rural areas who don't always have reliable access to internet or communication services.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Christopher Gilrein, Executive Director of Northeast TechNet: Northeast TechNet opposes **SB-00545** because they are concerned about lines 69-70 in Section 2, which could be interpreted by some to apply to the vast and constantly expanding sector of technology in Connecticut, something that is not currently within PURA's capabilities or responsibility. Northeast TechNet believes that it would be extremely expensive for the state to fully implement, and would be both confusing for businesses and consumers, those who are supposed to be protected. This would require PURA to dedicate significant state resources and time to develop stat FAQs, and train staff on how to respond to inquiries in the field. This would become an expensive undertaking for the state, which is a function that is already being provided by service providers themselves. This would take too much time and money for a service that already exists and is utilized in Connecticut.

Anna Lucey, Executive Vice President, Legislative and External Affairs of The New England and Connectivity and Telecommunications Association, Inc. (NECTA): NECTA opposes **SB-00545** because this bill broadens PURA's regulatory authorization to an unnecessary standard. NECTA believes that language in the bill is sweeping and inaccurate, leading it to be easily misunderstood. This would cause unintended consequences, which will in turn increase costs for the state, companies, and customers. This bill will significantly increase PURA's duties, costs, and obligations, which NECTA believes to be unnecessary. The call and email volume to PURA, which is currently being worked on by NECTA and the Authority and EOE to reduce calls, would increase exponentially. This would bring in more expenses than necessary and the proposed potentially confusing regulatory regime.

Reported by: Ciara Smith

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