OLR Bill Analysis
sSB 545

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

SUMMARY

This bill broadens telephone and telecommunications quality of service standards by (1) explicitly applying them to incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) and telecommunications providers regardless of technology (e.g., voice over internet protocol (VOIP) services) and (2) adding reporting requirements and a maximum $2,000 fine for companies that fail to comply with them.

The bill also prohibits telecommunications companies from (1) charging a customer a reconnection fee to remotely reconnect service after a disconnection or (2) requiring customers in households where all adults are older, blind, or living with a disability to pay an outstanding balance before restoring service. Under the bill, companies that violate these prohibitions are subject to a civil penalty of up to $1,000 per violation, per customer, and must reimburse customers for any unlawfully charged reconnection fees. The bill requires the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to enforce these prohibitions and allows PURA to designate a member from its consumer affairs or enforcement unit to conduct investigations and enforcement activities.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2025

QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Current law requires PURA to adopt quality of service standards for telephone companies, certified telecommunications providers, and all telecommunications services. By law, a certified telecommunications provider is a person PURA certifies to provide intrastate telecommunications services. A telephone company is a telecommunications company that provides at least one noncompetitive or emerging competitive service (see BACKGROUND). Quality of service standards include measures related to customer trouble reports, service outages, installation appointments, repeat problems, and timeliness in responding to complaints or reports.

The bill removes a provision requiring the standards to apply to all telecommunications services, instead applying them regardless of the transmission technology used, including VOIP. It specifies that these requirements also apply to ILECs, which are telephone companies that began providing telephone service in the state before the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Reports, Reviews, and Penalties

The bill requires PURA to adopt semiannual quality of service report requirements on compliance. Each telephone company, ILEC, and certified telecommunications provider must submit the reports to PURA by the last day of the month following the reporting period PURA establishes.

Under the bill, companies, ILECs, and providers that fail to meet any quality of service standard for more than two consecutive months must submit an exception report to PURA by the last day of the month immediately following those two months of failing to meet the standards. PURA must adopt exception report requirements.

The bill establishes a fine of up to $2,000 for any company, ILEC, or provider that fails to comply with semiannual or exception reporting requirements. The fine is in addition to any fines for failing to meet a quality of service standard. Reporting requirement violations are a continued violation from the date the company, ILEC, or provider fails to timely file a report until the date PURA receives the report. By law, for a continued violation, each day is deemed a separate offense.

The bill requires PURA's chairperson to designate a consumer affairs or enforcement unit representative to review the quality of service reports. The representative must do this in consultation with the Office of Consumer Counsel and report to PURA any failure to meet any quality of service standards indicated in any semiannual report.

PROHIBITED FEES AND PAYMENTS

The bill prohibits telecommunications companies from charging a customer a reconnection fee to remotely reconnect service after a service disconnection. Under the bill, a reconnection fee is a charge to restore telephone or telecommunications service that has been temporarily disconnected (i.e. interrupted for fewer than 14 days) for any reason. The prohibition applies regardless of (1) why the disconnection occurred (e.g., nonpayment or a breach of service agreement) or (2) whether the reconnection was initiated by the company or at the customer's request.

The bill also prohibits a telecommunications company from making a customer pay an outstanding balance before restoring service if each adult resident in the dwelling unit associated with the account is over age 60, blind, or living with a physical or intellectual disability (see BACKGROUND). It otherwise allows these companies to require a customer to pay the outstanding balance before restoring service.

The bill's prohibitions apply to telecommunications companies, which are any public service company, telephone company, or certified telecommunications provider that offers telephone or telecommunications services, including VOIP services, able to access the 9-1-1 service. They do not apply to any fee to establish a new account or activate new equipment with a telecommunications company.

BACKGROUND

Telecommunications Regulation

The law subjects telecommunications services to varying levels of regulation based on the service's degree of competitiveness and the type of company providing the service. Generally, it applies more stringent regulation of telephone companies providing noncompetitive services (i.e., legacy utility phone companies) and less stringent regulatory requirements for telecommunications providers providing competitive services. This framework emerged after the federal Telecommunications

Act of 1996 as a way to implement deregulation by creating a process for providers to certify that their services are competitive and therefore subject to lighter regulation.

Disability Definitions

By law, a person is blind if the person's central visual acuity does not exceed 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses, or if the person's visual acuity is greater than 20/200 but vision fields are limited such that the visual field's widest diameter subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees (CGS § 1-1f).

A physical disability is any chronic physical handicap, infirmity, or impairment, whether congenital or due to bodily injury, organic processes, or changes from an illness (e.g., epilepsy, deafness, hearing impairment, or reliance on a wheelchair) (CGS § 1-1f).

An intellectual disability is a significant limitation in intellectual functioning existing concurrently with adaptive behavior deficits that began during the developmental period before age 18 (CGS § 1-1g).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Energy and Technology Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 16 Nay 9 (03/13/2025)