

Telephone Customer Bill of Rights Bill of Rights

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is a state agency that has authority over many aspects of the service provided by your telephone company including rates and quality of service.

This “bill of rights” summarizes some of the PUCO’s rules for telephone companies. For more detailed information, please contact your telephone company or the PUCO for a complete text of the Minimum Telephone Service Standards.

Resolving Problems and Disputes

Informal Complaints

If you have a problem with your telephone bill or service, contact the phone company first. You may call or send a letter to the company. The telephone number to your phone company is printed on your bill. The telephone number is also located in the telephone directory, along with an address to the company.

If your concern is not resolved after contacting a customer service representative from the company, you may ask to speak with a supervisor. If your problem is still not resolved, contact the PUCO consumer call center for help. The call center staff will review rules with you, advise you of your rights, and if needed, will work with you and the company to try to solve your problem.

You may contact the PUCO at:
1-800 686-7826 (toll free)
Or for TTY at 1-800-686-1570 (toll free)
From 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays,
Or at www.PUCO.ohio.gov
Mail Address:
Service Monitoring and Enforcement Dept.
Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
180 East Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3793

Residential customers may also contact the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel for assistance with complaints and utility issues at 1-877-742-5622 (tool free) from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, or at www.pickocc.org

Formal Complaints

If you are not able to reach an agreement with the company through the PUCO’s informal complaint process, you have the right to file a formal complaint. You may obtain a formal complaint form from the call center representative, by writing to the PUCO or by accessing the PUCO’s web page.

If you are a residential consumer, you may represent yourself in the formal complaint proceeding or hire an attorney to represent you. The OCC represents residential utility customers in matters before the PUCO. OCC can be contacted toll free at 1-877-742-5622 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, or visit www.pickocc.org.

In most instances, business customers must be represented by an attorney.

After you file a formal complaint form, the PUCO determines if reasonable grounds exist for proceeding with your complaint, and will notify you as to its determination. If reasonable grounds are found to exist, you will be notified by mail of a date and time for a hearing, to take place at the PUCO offices in Columbus. The PUCO may set a pre-hearing conference with both the company and you (and your attorney if you have one) for one last attempt to resolve the matter before the scheduled hearing begins. However, if the case remains unresolved, once the hearing begins you will have the responsibility to prove the merits of the complaint. After the hearing is over, the PUCO will then review all the evidence presented at the hearing and make a decision on the case.

Ordering or Changing Service

When you order new local service or change your existing local service, your phone company will explain the choices available to you.

If you are a low income consumer, or are currently receiving assistance (such as HEAP, food stamps, etc.) from government agencies, you may be eligible for a discount on your basis local service, a waiver of service establishment fees and deposit, and/or a special payment plan. If you are interested in this assistance, be sure to tell your phone company.

After you've placed your order for new service or for a change to your existing service, you should receive, within ten business days, a welcome letter in the mail (or by e-mail if you signed up over the Internet). The welcome letter will include an explanation of the service(s) ordered, including the price, terms, and conditions. It is important that you review this letter to confirm your order. If you believe that the letter does not accurately reflect the service you ordered, you should contact the company immediately. You have 30 days from the postmark of the letter to change your initial order for regulated services at no additional charge.

Your local phone company may charge you a one-time installation or "service establishment" charge when your first establish service and each time you transfer service to a new address. Residential customers establishing basic local exchange service have the option to spread the payment of these charges over three billing periods.

Your local phone company normally must install new local service within five business days of receiving your order, unless you agree to a later date. If you are a residential or small business customer and the company does not provide service within this time frame, you may receive a full or partial waiver of the installation charges.

Your local phone company must also give you a four-hour appointment window for a technician to install service if you need to be present at the premises. If the company misses your scheduled installation appointment, without giving you 24 hours notice, you may be eligible for a waiver of a least one-half of the installation charges for the affected regulated local services.

When you order service and once each year, your local phone company will provide you with a free directory(ies), unless the company chooses to provide free directory assistance. You have a right to receive, upon request, a directory or directories listing all of the extended area service numbers within your local calling areas.

Repairing Your Service

Your local phone company is responsible for repairs and maintenance to the telephone network and outside wires leading up to your home or business. You or the property owner are responsible for the wiring inside your home or business, jacks, and equipment like telephone sets, answering machines, modems, fax machines, etc.

The point where the telephone company's network ends and the inside wiring begins is called the network interface device (NID). Many homes and businesses have located on their premises a NID, which can be used to check whether the problem with your service is your responsibility or the responsibility of the phone company.

If your phone service is not working, contact your company's repair office immediately. If you're not sure whether the problem is your responsibility or the company's responsibility, check in the directory or with your phone company for an explanation as to how to check your NID to see who's responsible and to find out what your repair options and charges are for repairs, if it is your responsibility. If you don't have a NID, the local phone company will diagnose the problem and install a device at no charge. If you rent, check with your landlord prior to scheduling any repairs.

Be aware that if the phone company makes a service trip to your premises and the problem is in the wiring inside your home or business, the repair is your responsibility and you may be required to pay a service charge to the company. You will not be charged if the repair is the company's responsibility.

Your local phone company must also give you a four-hour appointment window for a technician to repair service if you need to be present at the premises. If the company misses your scheduled repair appointment, you may be eligible for a waiver of one-half of one month's charges for the affected regulated local services rendered inoperative.

If the phone company takes more than seventy-two hours to restore your phone service, you may receive a credit on your next bill for one month's charges for the regulated local services rendered inoperative.

Paying For Your Service

The phone company will send you a bill every month and allow you at least 14 days to pay it. If you do not pay your bill on time, the company may disconnect your service. Before disconnecting your service, the phone company must send you a disconnect notice at least seven days before the shut-off date.

If you cannot pay your entire bill, contact the phone company. You may be able to keep part of your service if you pay enough to cover the charges for basic phone service, or you may be able to work out a payment plan with the company to keep your service.

Be aware that payment to an unauthorized payment agent does not guarantee same day posting to your payment.

Your service cannot be disconnected after 12:30 p.m., if the possibility of service reconnection on the next day is not a possibility. Should your service be disconnected, contact the company to find out what you need to do to have it restored.

You may have to pay a fee and/or a deposit to have your service reconnected.

Toll blocking, along with other blocking services, are available to help manage your bill. To learn more about blocking options such as blocks to 900 services, collect calls, third party calls, or pay-per-use features, contact your phone company. Some or all of these options are free of charge.

If you have a billing dispute, and you have made an informal or formal complaint to the PUCO, the company will not disconnect your service if you pay the undisputed portion of the bill. While the complaint is being investigated, you must pay all current undisputed amounts and continue discussion with the company to settle the complaint.

Privacy Options

Two options are available to prevent your phone number from displaying on a Caller ID device. Per call blocking is provided with your service at no additional charge. To use this, dial *67 from touchtone phones (rotary dial 1167) before each call you want blocked. Per line blocking, available for an additional charge, will block all your calls. Using this service, you may unblock individual calls by dialing *82 (rotary dial 1182). If you wish to have per line blocking, you should contact your local phone company and request it. Due to technical limitations, either service (per-call blocking or per-line blocking) may not be able to block the appearance of your phone number on caller ID devices when you dial an "800" number. The monthly rate for per line blocking will not exceed the monthly rate for a non-published number service. Further, there will be no additional monthly charge for per-line blocking to customers who subscribe to a non-published number service.

Slamming

You have the right to choose your local and long distance providers. No one can switch your providers without your permission. This is called slamming, and it is illegal. If you are slammed, you must contact your chosen company to re-establish service with that company. You must also contact the company which slammed you to cancel service with them and to arrange for any credits or refunds. If you are not satisfied after these calls, contact the PUCO call center.

Cramming

If your bill has charges on it for services you did not order, that is called cramming. Cramming is illegal. If these charges appear on your bill, call your local phone company and let them know you have been crammed. If the charges are from another company, they may also require you to call the cramming company to have them take you off their customer list. Otherwise, the charges may reappear on your next bill. If you are not satisfied after these calls, contact the PUCO call center.