



Telephone Facts



Q: What are “Bundled Services?”

A: “Bundled Services” are telephone service packages that “bundle” a number of different services together (for example, Local Service, Regional Toll Service, Long Distance Toll Service, plus Optional Services such as Caller ID, 3-Way Calling, etc.). Telephone companies offer the packages to consumers at a discounted flat monthly rate. This rate is lower than if you chose to buy the services individually.

(NOTE: Flat monthly rates quoted by telemarketers do NOT include mandatory taxes, surcharges and fees. The total monthly amount you must pay for the “bundled package” will be higher than the quoted amount. Choose bundles carefully, you may not need some of the services offered in the bundle, and it may be less expensive to just choose the one you need individually. Be aware that some features or services may require a one-time, non-recurring charge or may not be available to you.)

Q: What is “Cramming?”

A: “Cramming” is the fraudulent practice of placing unauthorized telecommunication products and service charges on your local telephone bill. The charges are often for non-basic services such as; Caller ID; Call Waiting; Call Forwarding; Voice Mail; a one-time charge for entertainment services; or a recurring monthly charge. These charges are billed in the “Non-Basic” section of your local telephone bill.

Q: What do I do if I see unauthorized charges “crammed” in the non-basic section of my local telephone bill?

A: The first thing you should do after you identify unauthorized or disputed charges on your “local” bill is, contact your local telephone company to file a dispute. You should attempt to have the unauthorized charges removed from your local bill.

(NOTE: You must contact your local telephone company first to try to resolve the matter. If you are unsatisfied with the local company’s response, you then have the right to contact the PUC’s Bureau of Consumer Services at 1-800-782-1110 to file a complaint for investigation. The Bureau of Consumer Service will investigate your complaint and respond to you with a decision.)

Q: What is “Slamming?”

A: “Slamming” is the unauthorized changing of a consumer’s telephone service provider or company without the consumer’s permission for in-state toll service, state-to-state toll service, or even International toll telephone service.

Q: What can I do if I’ve been “slammed?”

A: If toll charges appear on your local telephone bill from a company you did not choose to provide service, and you suspect you’ve been slammed, call your local company and tell them you’ve been slammed and request they remove the toll charges from your bill. The local company will send the charges back to the unauthorized service carrier and should remove any “change of carrier” charges (charges for switching carriers). This way your local service will not be affected. Tell your local company the name of the company you want to provide your toll service.

(NOTE: The unauthorized service carrier may re-bill you directly on a separate bill. If this happens you may want to contact the Federal Communications Commission at 1-800-225-5322 or the PA Bureau of Consumer Protection at 1-800-441-2555.)

Q: What can I do to prevent “slamming?”

A: Contact your local telephone company and request a “freeze” on your account to secure your toll carrier of choice, which cannot be changed without your expressed consent.

(NOTE: If you later decide to change your toll carrier you MUST first contact your local telephone company to remove the freeze.)

Q: What is “Sliding?”

A: “Sliding” is a form of “slamming.” It occurs when a telephone company uses a customer’s authorized request for changes to one service, to then add, change or “slide” the customer to an unauthorized telephone service. For example, a customer may request to change their long distance service provider. When the customer receives their telephone bill, they discover that their regional toll service was also changed, but without the customer’s permission.

Q: Do I need to select a long distance carrier?

A: No. You can request “NONE” or “NO” long distance company from your local telephone company. You may choose this option because you never make long distance calls, you use a pre-paid phone card for your long distance calls or you make long distance calls on your wireless (cell) phone. You may add a long distance company at a later time. However, you will have to pay a charge. The charge is an Federal Communications Commission mandated fixed charge (usually \$5.00). Your local telephone company will add this charge to your bill to make the change each and every time you request a change. The PUC does not regulate this charge.

Q: Can the PUC investigate disputed charges billed to the customer of record that result from the collect calls made to the customer's telephone number from a correctional facility?

A: Yes, however, the PUC can only work toward having the disputed charges “removed” from the customer's local bill. The PUC does NOT have the authority to determine the validity of the charges or the liability of the charges.

(NOTE: Further, the PUC does NOT have jurisdiction or authority over the carrier selected by the correctional facility to provide telephone service, service contracts, length of calls, call monitoring, quality of calls or rates. For disputes about these issues contact the Federal Communications Commission at 1-800-225-5322 or the PA Bureau of Consumer Protection at 1-800-441-2555.)

Q: What is the most useful source of information for questions regarding telephone service, optional features, charges and local calling areas?

A: The front section of your local telephone directory is a very valuable source of information about telephone service. In addition, if you have access to Internet service, you can use it to learn more about telephone features and options. The Federal Communications Commission's website at www.fcc.gov/cib is also a good resource for finding out about a variety of telephone issues.



Service/Billing Definitions

Basic Service: Telecommunications service within a customer's local calling area. Basic service includes the customer's local calling plan, dial tone line, touch tone, and directory assistance calls allowed without an additional charge. Charges for basic service also include the Public Safety Emergency Telephone Act (911) fee, the Pennsylvania relay surcharge, the federal universal service fund surcharge, the local number portability surcharge and federal and state taxes, and a fee for having a non-published listing, if you choose to have a non-published number.

Toll Service: Telecommunications service beyond a customer's local calling area. There are two distinct types of toll service: (1) Local or Regional Toll Service which covers short distance calls made to locations outside your local calling area but within the region where you live; and (2) Long Distance Toll Service which handles calls made to locations beyond the region where you live. Toll service charges on your bill might also include any charges for any collect calls you accepted during the recent billing period.

Non-Basic: Non-basic services are “optional” services and include such features as Call Waiting, Caller ID, Call Forwarding, Maintenance Agreements for Inside Wiring, etc.

(NOTE: Some optional features may not be available in your area, or they may not be compatible with certain telephone equipment. Optional features may be included in “bundled” packages offered by the local service providers that provide telephone service in the area where you live.)



If you identify or dispute any charges appearing on your local telephone bill after reviewing it, you MUST first contact your local telephone provider to file a dispute and allow them to explain the charges or resolve the matter before contacting the PUC's Bureau of Consumer Services (1-800-782-1110). Visit our website at www.puc.state.pa.us.