



PURA Conducts Forum on Frontier's Operations, at the Request of OCC

On December 22, 2014, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) held a technical session so that members of the public, the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC), the Attorney General's office (AG), and other interested parties could engage with key Frontier management personnel about issues that have arisen in the Frontier/ATT transition. In late October 2014, Frontier purchased the traditional telephone, digital telephone, television (U-Verse), and broadband services of AT&T in Connecticut, and it has been providing those services now for approximately two months. On November 13, 2014, Consumer Counsel Elin Swanson Katz and Attorney General George Jepsen asked PURA to hold the session because of various customer complaints, including as to service reliability issues, changes in service offerings, difficulties with internet speeds, slow customer service response times, and missed service appointments. At the technical session, Frontier brought several high-level members of their management team to try to answer questions about technical and customer service issues. Several customers attended and described their issues to Frontier and Frontier brought additional customer service staff with computers to try to address issues "on the spot." OCC asked many questions of Frontier management about general and specific issues that have arisen in its contacts with customers.

While the majority of customers have experienced limited issues from the transition, such as having to adjust their auto-pay settings or temporary delays with restoring the U-Verse "video on demand" service, others have experienced more serious issues. Frontier has taken a variety of steps to ameliorate the concerns and solve problems, including by making repairs, increasing and re-training customer service personnel, customer communications, and issuing a \$50 credit to U-Verse television customers. Some transitional billing issues remain, and Frontier has not been able to offer some of the streaming video content on the computer that AT&T had provided because of different contractual relationships with providers. Other customers continue to experience slow internet speeds or other reliability issues, but some of those may be normal maintenance problems rather than being transition-related. Frontier did acknowledge that there had been missed service appointments due to heavy volume of transition-related issues, but that problem seems to be dissipating. OCC is nevertheless pressing Frontier to move from 8-hour to 4-hour service appointments as we get beyond the transition stage and into "business as usual."

Frontier stated at the technical session that 99% of customers experienced a seamless transition, but Frontier bases that figure on customer complaints. OCC has in prior years challenged AT&T on using customer service complaint counts to determine the number of service problems and does not support Frontier's use of that measure either. Customers may fail to contact the company for a variety of reasons despite having a service problem, including: (i) slow customer service answering times, coupled with the customer's busy schedule; (ii) the customer contacts a state agency instead; (iii) the customer waits and sees if the problem is temporary; or (iv) the customer "votes with their feet" and opts to take service from a different company. While OCC agrees that it is likely that a majority of customers did not experience major issues during the transition, there is no way of knowing whether the correct figure is 99%.

Although PURA, and not OCC, has the consumer intake personnel in their consumer services unit, some customers have also reached out directly to OCC with their issues with Frontier, and OCC has spent many hours communicating with the customers and Frontier to try to get these issues resolved, often with success. Frontier management has been responsive to OCC's requests for information and has tried to craft resolutions with customers even though many of the issues raised (including digital phone issues, as well as many internet and video service issues) are not actually state-regulated. OCC appreciates the customers that have reached out to it during the transition, as their efforts have helped OCC understand some of the systemic problems that arose and to press Frontier to resolve them. However, with the transition phase coming to a close, OCC asks that customers use the PURA Consumer Services Unit (1-800-382-4586) as their first contact because that unit is staffed for individual consumer intake and OCC is not. OCC will continue to monitor Frontier's services closely and will continue to communicate with Frontier to ensure that the customers will benefit from the transaction and to minimize any negative impacts.