



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY AUTHORITY

*Last Revised July 20, 2020*

## Telecommunications Sector Frequently Asked Questions

### General Telecomm Questions

#### **What's the difference between wireline and wireless telephone service?**

Wireline service means the telephone is connected to the telephone company's facilities by use of a wire. This includes portable and cordless phones because their base connects into the facilities. Wireline service is also known as landline service.

Wireless service covers cell phones and other devices that use radio waves to transmit voice, text messages, and data through the company's facilities.

#### **What is the difference between local service and long distance service provided by wireline telephone companies?**

Local telephone service allows you to make and to receive telephone calls. The monthly service charge also covers calls that occur to places near you. Your telephone company may provide your local service at a flat rate per month. Some telephone companies also offer measured local service, which could include a set number of minutes or calls per month, and if you exceed that allowance, you may be billed, per call or per minute. Calls placed to locations outside your local service area may be billed, depending on the location or distance. They may be referred to as local toll or long distance calls. You can choose to have your local telephone company provide your local toll call service, or you can obtain it from another company. You can choose which company to provide your long distance service. You can also select no company, if you choose not to have long distance service. Long distance service includes; intrastate (calls that occur from one part of the state to another beyond the local call service area), interstate (calls that travel across state lines), or international (calls that are placed to another country).

#### **Do I have a choice of local phone service providers?**

Consumers and businesses often have a choice of providers for their local and long distance services. Local service is offered by wireline, wireless, and cable companies, and Internet-based phone companies. Shop around and compare services and rates before you select who will provide your service.

## **Must I use the same phone company for my local and long distance wireline services?**

In many cases you get to choose which company will provide your local phone service; that is the ability to make and receive calls. Often you may have that company provide your local toll and long distance calling service or select a different phone company. Local toll calls are calls to phone numbers that are located beyond your “free” calling area. Long distance calls are calls farther away or those that are to another state or country.

## **How to Contact the CT PURA with a Complaint about your Telecommunications Service**

### **How do I register a complaint about wireline or wireless service?**

Contact the CT PURA Education and Outreach Unit at 860-827-1553, use the online complaint form available [here](#), or write to:

CT PURA Education and Outreach Unit  
10 Franklin Square  
New Britain, CT 06051

## **Telecomm Billing Questions**

### **Can my phone company charge me a late fee?**

Yes. However, late fee policies vary between companies and must be stated on the bill. If you and the phone company agree to a payment plan, which may include a balance that could be charged late fees, ask if they will waive those fees. Moreover, if you are late, you may be subject to suspension of service and or disconnection.

### **If I cannot pay my bill, when can my phone company disconnect my service?**

Wireline phone companies cannot disconnect your basic local voice service for non-payment of other services such as interstate long distance, Internet access, or wireless services, but they may discontinue to bill for these services, and you may then get a separate bill directly from the company that provides these services to you. If you make no payment or a partial payment that is not enough to cover the charges for basic service (including associated taxes, fees, and surcharges), the phone company can disconnect your local service once proper notice has been given. If disconnected, you may have to pay a deposit and service charge to restore your service. Other phone companies, including wireless and some VoIP companies, can disconnect your voice service for failure to pay any part of your bill. Ask your company for its policy.

Before disconnecting service, the wireline company must send you a termination notice that service will be disconnected if not paid by the date posted on the notice. Most telephone companies will not disconnect you on a day when their customer service offices are closed. Even if all of your services are disconnected for non-payment, residential wireline users will be able to use their phones to call 911 for 120 days where operating conditions permit. Wireless phones only need charged batteries to call 911.

### **Can I arrange to pay my bill using an alternate payment plan?**

You can request that the phone company work with you to spread out your past due amounts in installment payments or some alternative payment plan. While most companies are willing to work with you, they are not required to do so.

### **When can my phone company charge me a deposit?**

Most companies require an application for new service that includes questions to determine your credit worthiness. Each phone company will have a different policy or process for deciding whether to charge a deposit. Generally companies look at previous payment history on phone bills along with your overall credit history. Some phone companies may request a credit report.

- If you are required to pay the deposit, keep in mind that the company generally will pay a small amount of interest on the deposit, especially if they hold a deposit for a year or more.
- If a deposit is on file when service is disconnected; the company will use the deposit to pay any charges on the bill and will return what is left of the deposit to you.
- If you have paid your bills on time and have not been subject to disconnection for a year, some companies will return your deposit.
- If you are signing up only for basic, local, voice service, the deposit may be limited to twice the estimated or typical monthly bill (excluding taxes, set up fees, and other miscellaneous charges).
- If you are signing up for other services such as long distance, broadband, and wireless, then the deposit may be higher. Customers enrolled in Connecticut LifeLine, the discount phone service, cannot be charged a deposit.

## **Questions about Universal Service**

### **What is Connecticut LifeLine?**

Connecticut LifeLine provides discounted basic telephone (landline) services to eligible Connecticut households.

You may qualify for Connecticut LifeLine if you are enrolled in any one of the following public assistance programs: Medical/Medi-CT, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps, Healthy Families Category A, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Tribal TANF, Women, Infant, and Children Program (WIC), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Federal Public Housing Assistance or Section 8, National School Lunch FREE Lunch Program (NSL), Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, or Head Start Income Eligible (Tribal Only). You can also qualify for Connecticut LifeLine if your total household income does not exceed certain income maximums.

For more information, visit <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>.

**10 Franklin Square, New Britain, CT 06051**

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[www.ct.gov/pura](http://www.ct.gov/pura)

### **What is "universal service" and how is it funded?**

One of the goals of U.S. and Connecticut telecommunications policies has been to achieve "universal service." That means providing access to affordable telephone service to everyone in the country, including customers with low income, those who are disabled, or customers living in rural areas where the small number of customers scattered over great distances makes it expensive to provide telephone service. Programs to achieve this goal are supported by surcharges on phone service.

### **What is the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) charge?**

The Federal USF was created by the federal government to help ensure basic, affordable telecommunications service for all consumers across the country, especially residents in high-cost rural communities and low-income customers. Additionally, the Federal USF provides for discounted telecommunications services for schools, libraries, and rural health-care facilities. All telecommunications providers are required to pay into the Federal USF and their contributions may be recovered from customers. If you would like more information about federal charges or services, visit the Federal Communications Commission's website at <http://www.fcc.gov/>.

## **Questions about Wireless Telephone Service**

### **Can I dial 911 from my wireless telephone?**

Yes, a wireless phone can call 911 if the batteries are charged, whether or not that phone has an active account with a wireless phone company. However, you cannot be certain that the emergency operators will receive your location from a call made from a wireless phone. Therefore, it is important to follow basic steps when calling 911 from mobile phones:

1. Tell the emergency operator the location of the emergency right away.
2. Give the emergency operator your wireless phone number so that if the call gets disconnected, the operator can call you back.
3. If you have a wireless phone that is not "activated" and your emergency call gets disconnected, you must call the 911 operator back because he or she does not have your telephone number and cannot contact you or find your location.

## **Questions about the Do-Not-Call Registry and How it Works**

### **Why would I register my phone number with the National Do Not Call Registry?**

The National Do Not Call Registry, which is only for personal phone numbers, gives you an opportunity to limit the telemarketing calls you receive. The National Do Not Call Registry is managed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). You may place your phone number(s) on the registry online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) or by calling the registry's toll-free number (1-888-382-1222) (TTY 1-866-290-4236) and following the prompts. Once you register your phone number, telemarketers covered by the National Do Not Call Registry have up to 31 days from the date you register to stop calling you.

### **If I registered by phone, will I receive a confirmation?**

No, but you can verify that your number is on the registry online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) or by calling the registry's toll-free number (1-888-382-1222) and following the prompts.

### **Can I register my cell phone on the National Do Not Call Registry?**

Yes, you may place your personal cell phone number on the National Do Not Call Registry. There is no deadline to register a home or cell phone number on the Registry.

### **Can I register my business phone number or a fax number?**

No. The National Do Not Call Registry is only for personal phone numbers. Business-to-business calls and faxes are not covered by the National Do Not Call Registry.

### **How long does my phone number stay registered?**

Your phone number will remain on the registry unless you choose to take it off or your phone number is disconnected. If you get a new phone number, you should register that as well. You may want to print the web page for your records when your registration is accepted.