

**State of Connecticut
Office Of Consumer Counsel**

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OCC Testimony

**PB 657 "AAC Consumer Protection Of Cable Television And Video
Service Customers."**

Connecticut General Assembly

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The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) believes that **PB 657 "AAC Consumer Protection Of Cable Television And Video Service Customers"** has much potential for expanding the regulatory authority of Connecticut, to enhance consumer protection and the OCC would welcome a role in advocating for consumers in this area if this bill becomes law.

Telecommunications services (phone, cable, and broadband-Internet) are extremely deregulated which has resulted in a much-reduced role for state regulatory oversight of these essential services. As is common with a

“duopoly” market such as exists between telephone companies and cable operators for most telecommunication services in this state and the nation, the result is minimal competition among any of these companies for any services in any franchise in Connecticut.

Yet, state and federal laws have been subject for decades to extreme pressure from the industry participants and have thus largely accepted industry claims of “competitive pressures” exerting effective regulation over rates, performance and quality of service issues. The truth is that deregulation of these services has yielded dismal service quality and ever-increasing prices, with a multitude of market plans that increase costs through bundling services. Acquiring basic television programming through any of the outlets is basically impossible, and as other proposed bills offered in this session have illustrated, basic telephone is rapidly headed toward oblivion as well, again with no options available for consumers of basic telephone service.

Not coincidentally, while video services offered by the telephone companies or cable operators are largely deregulated, their service quality complaints level is among the highest of all utilities operating in Connecticut.

According to the latest PURA Consumer Scorecard available, 2007-10, consumer complaints about the prices, programming, and general services rendered by cable television operators in this state are second only to the electric distributions companies in number. Thus, “Cable” and “Video Service Provider” complaints outscore those lodged with PURA for utility providers of services for water, gas, and telecommunications (i.e., telephone).

While the OCC applauds the themes detailed in this bill and hopes to help with its passage, OCC is not funded to perform the handling of complaints and thus lacks personnel or equipment (phone and data services) to work with the public on utility complaints. That function resides with PURA’s Consumer Services Unit, which has funding and personnel in a call center devoted to individual complaints. OCC’s enabling statute, C.G.S. Section 16-2a, authorizes OCC to act on behalf of all the state’s consumers, residential and business, not with individual complaints. With budget cuts and an inability to hire new personnel, OCC’s ability to resolve or even track utility complaints is limited.