

Your Rights as a Telephone Customer

Know your payment and disconnection rights as a telephone customer



Your rights as a telephone customer

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) oversees various portions of the telephone industry to ensure utilities are providing adequate service at reasonable rates. There are many state and federal laws that promote competition and grant certain rights to customers, including:

- The right to choose a telephone company when more than one is available,
- The right to be informed of basic services and the range of monthly rates,
- The right to safe, adequate and continuous service,
- The right for low-income customers to qualify for assistance in establishing telephone service or paying monthly bills through the Wisconsin Lifeline & Link-Up Program, and
- The right to have a complaint about disputed charges or service investigated.

How can the PSC help?

If you have concerns with your telephone provider, you must first try to resolve the problem directly with the company. If you are not satisfied with the provider's response, contact the PSC Consumer Affairs Division at 608-266-2001, 1-800-225-7729, or on the web at:

<http://psc.wi.gov/consumerinfo/complaintoverview.htm>.

Payments and disconnections

Deposits

Phone companies may require a deposit to start service. The deposit should not exceed the amount of local service and two months of estimated or actual long distance service.

The following rules apply to payment and refund of deposits:

- **Existing Residential Service**

A deposit can be requested only if your service was disconnected during the last 12 months for nonpayment of an undisputed account or your initial application was falsified or incomplete.

- **New Residential Service**

A deposit can be requested only if you have an unpaid bill with a Wisconsin phone company within the last six years which remains undisputed. A deposit can also be required if there is good reason to believe that you do not intend to, or will be unable to, pay your bills at the time payment is due.

- **Business Service**

A deposit can be requested if your credit is not satisfactorily established by the phone company.

For residential service, the deposit will be refunded, with interest, after 12 consecutive months of service without a disconnection. For business service, the deposit will be refunded, with interest, after 24 months if your credit standing is satisfactory.

Service Disconnection

Phone service can be disconnected if you:

- Fail to pay a delinquent account that exceeds one month's local service charges,
- Fail to comply with a deferred payment agreement,
- Interfere with the service of others or operate nonstandard equipment,
- Fail to pay a required deposit, or
- Falsify your application for service.

The phone company must mail a 5-day written notice before disconnection, except when an emergency or dangerous condition exists. The disconnection notice must include the dispute procedures. Both you and the phone company must make reasonable attempts to resolve the problem. Only the portion of the bill in dispute may be left unpaid while the matter is in dispute. Never ignore a disconnection notice. Contact the phone company immediately.

Deferred Payment Agreements

Residential customers are allowed to make arrangements to pay past due bills in installments. When you agree to make a reasonable down payment on current and past due bills, and to pay the remaining amount in reasonable installments, your service may not be disconnected. Reasonable amounts are determined by individual circumstances. A deferred payment agreement may not include a finance charge.

If you default on the deferred payment agreement, the phone company may disconnect service and is not required to offer you a new deferred payment agreement prior to disconnection.

How to resolve disputes

Tips for Dispute Resolution

There may be several phone companies involved in providing different services on your phone bill. Understanding who the companies are may help you to dispute unwanted charges more efficiently. You may have a local company, a local toll company, and a long distance company. The local company may also provide billing and collection services for your long distance company and non-telecommunications related services.

Any of the above types of companies may use billing agents. To dispute unwanted charges, consumers should start with the billing agent or company listed on the bill. If these companies do not adequately respond to the dispute, customers should contact the local company to ask for dispute resolution. An adequate dispute resolution may include an explanation of the charges, proof of authorization of the charges, and/or removal of the charges from the consumer's bill.

If you cannot resolve the problem with your phone company, you may contact the PSC Consumer Affairs Division at 608-266-2001, 1-800-225-7729, or on the web at:

<http://psc.wi.gov/consumerinfo/complaintoverview.htm>.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is an independent state agency that oversees more than 1,100 Wisconsin public utilities that provide natural gas, electricity, heat, steam, water and telecommunications services.



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

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