



Know your rights...

Telephone Disconnection & Reconnection

What to do if you're facing disconnection

If you receive a disconnection notice, you should contact your local telephone company to make payment arrangements. Many telephone companies have assistance programs that discount basic telephone service for those who qualify. The Office of the Ohio Consumer's Counsel (OCC) also is available to assist residential consumers facing disconnection at 1-877-PICKOCC.

If a customer is being disconnected for non-payment, the disconnect notice must include, among other items, the following:

- reason for disconnection,
- amount needed to pay to avoid disconnection of local service,
- earliest date when disconnection can occur,
- address and telephone number of the utility office where payment can be sent and
- explanation that an additional charge for reconnection may apply if service is disconnected.

In addition, companies must send a notice at least seven days before the customer's telephone service is disconnected. Due to changes in recent rules, this notice may be included on a customer's bill, not a separate notice.

Most local telephone companies must maintain access to emergency services at least 14 days past

the disconnection date for any residential customer who is disconnected for non-payment. This will allow the customer to call 9-1-1 or an operator where 9-1-1 access is not available. The customer will not be allowed to make calls to non-emergency services (e.g., family members, a hospital or doctor), nor can the customer receive calls.

Your local service cannot be disconnected:

- For failure to pay for service furnished to a former subscriber unless the former subscriber is still a member of your household;
- For failure to pay for a different class of service (e.g., residential service cannot be disconnected for failure to pay for business service); or
- For failure to pay amount that you are disputing (you must pay the undisputed portion of the bill).

How to get reconnected

Telephone companies in Ohio (with a few exceptions) cannot deny reconnection of local service to consumers with previous credit problems (including past due balances for long-distance charges) as long as the customer:

- pays for all past due service charges, or
- agrees to a payment arrangement and makes the first installation payment, if required.

Customers may be responsible for deposit and reconnection charges. Deposit fees cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one

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month's local service. The local telephone company cannot force a consumer to pay any charges that were not on the disconnection notice in order to be reconnected.

About “prepaid” local telephone services

Some companies may offer you telephone service at significantly higher prices than those of local telephone companies. Often, these prepaid companies target customers who have no credit, bad credit or been disconnected by a local telephone company for nonpayment. Monthly charges of \$29.99 to \$59.99 for basic service are common and features such as caller ID and call waiting also may be higher.

Before enrolling with a prepaid service, you should learn as much as possible about the terms and conditions of the service. Read service applications and promotional materials carefully and ask about payment schedules, acceptable payment methods

and disconnection policies. Pay particular attention to your first month's charges.

Remember you may be able to return to your traditional telephone company and receive assistance. For example, low-income customers may be eligible for a company's Lifeline program, including significantly lower monthly local calling charges. Before enrolling with a prepaid local telephone service, consult the OCC at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) to find out about your telephone rights, income-based assistance plans and prepaid local telephone service.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:

Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574
Write: 10 West Broad Street, 18th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3485
E-mail: occ@occ.state.oh.us • Internet Address: www.pickocc.org