Resolution
Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
Governing Board

In Support of Preserving Affordable Basic Local Telephone Service
with Adequate Quality for Ohioans

WHEREAS, Electricity, natural gas, telephone, and water services are
essential for Ohioans; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, when the telephone industry was seeking legislation
that would have adversely impacted the availability of basic
local telephone service for consumers, the Governing Board
approved a Resolution for maintaining that service "with
price and quality protections for consumers..." (Resolution,
June 4, 2013); and

WHEREAS, The telephone industry (AT&T, Ohio Telecom Association
and others) is again supporting legislation to weaken
protections for consumers of basic local telephone service, in
Substitute House Bill 402 (the "Bill") that was introduced in
the 132nd Ohio General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, It is the policy of the state of Ohio to ensure the availability
of adequate basic local exchange service or voice service to
citizens throughout the state; and

WHEREAS, Ohio law appropriately requires local telephone companies
to provide basic local telephone service, on a reasonable and
nondiscriminatory basis, to all persons in their service areas who
request basic local telephone service; and

WHEREAS, Basic local telephone service is an essential service to
thousands of Ohioans, especially for elderly, low-income, and
rural consumers who do not have affordable alternatives for
the basic local telephone service offered by their telephone
company; and

WHEREAS, Basic local telephone service should provide residential
consumers with unlimited local calling at an affordable flat
rate with enforceable standards for service quality; and

WHEREAS, All residential consumers should have access to 9-1-1
emergency communications, particularly in areas where
 cellular services are inadequate; and

WHEREAS, Substitute House Bill 402 would allow local telephone
companies to increase monthly charges to residential and
small business consumers for basic local telephone service by
two dollars every year, a significant increase over the annual
rate increase ($1.25) currently allowed by law; and

WHEREAS, Substitute House Bill 402 could remove, in four years, any
limit on increases in monthly charges to residential and small
business consumers for basic local telephone service, based
on a standard that telephone companies could already meet
in most areas of Ohio if Ohio lawmakers take no action to
limit monthly charges to customers after a status report by the
PUCO is submitted to the General Assembly; and
WHEREAS, The allowance of significant rate increases (and other reductions in consumer protection) through Substitute House Bill 402 could harm consumers of basic local telephone service; and

WHEREAS, In the Ohio House of Representatives the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel testified jointly with the Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, HARCATUS Tri-County Community Action, Ohio Poverty Law Center, and Pro Seniors in opposition to Substitute House Bill 402 – and AARP and Southeastern Ohio Legal Services separately testified to their concerns about the Bill – to recommend that legislators protect basic local telephone service consumers by preserving the existing limits on price increases and enforceable standards for service quality.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel supports the availability of affordable, reasonably priced basic local telephone service with enforceable standards for adequate service quality for residential consumers throughout Ohio.

AND THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel opposes the enactment of Substitute House Bill 402 as being contrary to the public's interest in the availability of affordable, reasonably priced basic local telephone service for residential consumers throughout Ohio.

I verify that this Resolution has been approved by the Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, this 15th day of May 2018.

Michael Watkins, Chairman
Governing Board of the Office of the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel