



California Public Utilities Commission
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PRESS RELEASE

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CPUC Rejects AT&T's Request to Withdraw as Carrier of Last Resort; Opens New Rulemaking Process

SAN FRANCISCO, June 20, 2024 – The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), following extensive public input, today rejected AT&T's request to withdraw as a carrier of last resort (COLR) and opened a new Rulemaking process to address COLR telecommunications service obligations.

Understanding the Carrier of Last Resort Obligation

- A COLR is a telecommunications service provider that stands ready to provide basic telephone service, commonly via landline, to any customer requesting such service within a specified area.
- At least one telephone company in a specified area is legally required to provide access to telephone service to anyone in its service territory who requests it. This is known as the COLR obligation, which ensures that everyone in California has access to safe, reliable, and affordable telephone service.
- CPUC rules require a COLR in all service areas to ensure universal access to telecommunications services.
- COLR rules are technology-neutral and do not distinguish between voice services offered (such as Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS), commonly known as landline service, or Voice over Internet protocol (VoIP)), and do not prevent AT&T from retiring copper facilities or from investing in fiber or other facilities/technologies to improve its network.

What AT&T Proposed

Currently, AT&T is the designated COLR in many parts of the state and is the largest COLR in California. Where AT&T is the default telephone service provider means that the company must provide telephone service over any technology, such as copper, fiber, cable, VoIP, or wireless, to any potential

customer in that service territory. AT&T proposed to withdraw as the COLR without a new carrier being designated as a COLR.

Following review of AT&T's request, which received over 5,000 public comments and for which the CPUC held eight Public Forums drawing more than 5,800 attendees, the CPUC today denied AT&T's request.

CPUC Rejection of AT&T's Request Safeguards Access to Essential Services

The CPUC's rejection of AT&T's request underscores the critical importance of ensuring universal access to essential telecommunications services for all Californians. As the designated COLR, AT&T plays a pivotal role in providing reliable telephone service to communities across the state. Despite AT&T's contention that providers of voice alternatives to landline service – such as VoIP or mobile wireless services – can fill the gap, the CPUC found AT&T did not meet the requirements for COLR withdrawal. Specifically, AT&T failed to demonstrate the availability of replacement providers willing and able to serve as COLR, nor did AT&T prove that alternative providers met the COLR definition.

Additionally, public commenters at CPUC Public Forums highlighted the unreliability of voice alternatives such as mobile wireless or VoIP. With the dismissal of AT&T's withdrawal request, the CPUC reaffirms its commitment to safeguard access to essential services and maintain regulatory oversight of the telecommunications industry.

“Our vote to dismiss AT&T's application made clear that we will protect customer access to basic telephone service – no matter where they live, income, or access to other forms of communication. Our rules were designed to provide that assurance, and AT&T's application did not follow our rules,” said Commissioner John Reynolds, who is assigned to the proceeding.

New Proceeding Initiated

The CPUC also opened a new proceeding today (called a Rulemaking) to adapt its regulations to evolving market conditions and technological advancements while continuing to meet the needs of Californians.

“For nearly 30 years, the carrier of last resort rules have been essential for ensuring universal telephone service in California,” said CPUC President Alice Reynolds. “This new Rulemaking provides an opportunity to update the COLR rules and High-Cost Fund programs to better meet the needs of Californians and to achieve the state’s [Broadband For All](#) objectives.”

More Information

- COLR Proposal Voted On [\[Here\]](#)
- COLR Proceeding Webpage with FAQ: [\[Here\]](#)
- Documents Related to the Proceeding [\[Here\]](#)
- List of areas where AT&T was requesting to withdraw as the designated COLR [\[Here\]](#)
 - Map with address look-up [\[Here\]](#)
- New Rulemaking [\[Here\]](#)

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About the California Public Utilities Commission

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, protects consumers, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. Visit www.cpuc.ca.gov for more information.