Prepared Testimony of

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before the

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Boscola and members of the Senate Consumer Protection & Professional Licensure Committee. My name is Stephen M. DeFrank, Chairman of the Public Utility Commission (Commission). I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee today on the topic of Verizon's Application to Discontinue Copper Landline Service in Pennsylvania.

I want to quickly acknowledge at the outset of my testimony that as a public utility regulator, I must limit my comments to the scope of Verizon's Application now pending with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Because it is possible that other matters involving Verizon's regulated utility service in Pennsylvania may be currently pending, or become pending, and require adjudication by the Commission, today I will speak only about Verizon's Application pending with the FCC.

Discussion

Access to Telephone Service

In my role as Chairman, I take very seriously the Commission's obligation to ensure that Pennsylvanians have affordable and reliable access to telephone service, including basic standalone telephone service. Under Chapter 30 of the Public Utility Code[1], as well as in Chapter 63 of the Commission's Regulations[2], the Commission has authority over the rates, conditions, and quality of service for copper wire telephone service. However, notwithstanding the Commission's authority, it is important for me to acknowledge that Verizon's Application is pending before the FCC and not before our Commission here in Pennsylvania. This distinction is important because it underscores the fact that the FCC, not the Commission, will decide whether to grant Verizon's request. Verizon's Application will be decided under federal law, regulations, and standards using the FCC's rules, timelines, and processes. Because of this reality, the Commission is carefully reviewing Verizon's Application and the FCC procedures that will govern. We are undertaking a careful evaluation of the options and actions necessary to ensure that Pennsylvanians do not lose access to adequate, reliable and affordable telephone service.

Verizon's Application

The Commission first became aware of Verizon's proposal to discontinue providing what it refers to as "Plain Old Telephone Service" (POTS) in Pennsylvania when Verizon served us with a copy of its Application just over a month ago. In the Application, Verizon pointed to challenges associated with legacy copper wire service, including that copper wires are costly to repair, aged, and highly vulnerable to severe weather. According to Verizon, transitioning legacy POTS customers to modern networks would facilitate resiliency, connectivity, and maximize the benefit of federal broadband funding.

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[1] 66 Pa. C.S. §§ 3010-3019.
[2] 52 Pa. Code §§ 63.1-63.325.

Verizon's Application indicates that it previously received approval to discontinue POTS in portions of thirteen other states.[3]

Unfortunately, upon the Commission's receipt of Verizon's Application, it became clear that information specific to Pennsylvania customers and the impact upon them was not readily available. Significantly, aside from Pennsylvania, Verizon's Application also simultaneously sought the FCC's approval to discontinue Verizon POTS service in the District of Columbia, as well as eight other states.[4] As a result, Verizon's Application mainly includes aggregated information for all impacted jurisdictions; therefore, information regarding the potential impact in Pennsylvania is limited. As an example, Verizon's Application indicates that approximately 750,000 residential and business locations, or 2.7% of its customer base across all of the impacted states, still subscribe to legacy service—but the impact in Pennsylvania was not quantified. The Commission contacted Verizon and learned that an estimated 200,000[5] Pennsylvania customers may be impacted, with approximately 165,000 of them being residential customers. This means that Pennsylvania customers will be inordinately impacted, as approximately 27% of all POTS customers affected by Verizon's Application are Pennsylvania customers.

Impacted incumbent local exchange carriers in Pennsylvania were identified as the following jurisdictional entities who provide service across the Commonwealth:

- Frontier Communications of Pennsylvania, LLC
- Frontier Communications of Breezewood, LLC
- Frontier Communications of Canton, LLC
- Frontier Communications of Lakewood, LLC
- Frontier Communications of Oswayo River, LLC
- Commonwealth Telephone Company LLC d/b/a Frontier Communications Commonwealth Telephone Company
- Citizens Telecommunications Company of New York, Inc. d/b/a Frontier Communications of New York
- Verizon Pennsylvania, LLC
- Verizon North LLC

From our preliminary review of Verizon's Application, we understand that Verizon is seeking to discontinue POTS for its Pennsylvania customers on or after November 30, 2026, with some caveats. Verizon represents that it is not seeking to discontinue copper wire services where customers are unable to get facilities-based service either directly

[3] These states include Alabama, Georgia, Iowa, Mississippi, and Tennessee; Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. The Commission also understands that Verizon filed an Application with the FCC to discontinue POTS in Arizona, Delaware, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia at WC Docket No. 26-277, but that it remains pending since the FCC denied an automatic grant on September 25, 2026, citing a need for additional review.

[4] These states include California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and West Virginia.

[5] Verizon informed the Commission that the actual number of customers impacted is likely to decrease pending further review of replacement service options.

from Verizon or from alternative providers within the discontinuance area.[6] Verizon also indicated that it would work directly with impacted customers to identify suitable replacement options, which could include service over fiber optic lines where available or home phone replacement services that preserve a familiar landline experience using existing handsets while operating over Verizon's network.

According to Verizon's Application, customer notices were mailed to affected Pennsylvania POTS customers by Verizon on September 8, 2026; however, it remains unclear whether and to what extent Verizon engaged in community outreach in Pennsylvania.

Further Inquiry is Necessary

The Commission is actively seeking additional information about Verizon's Application and the Pennsylvania-specific aspects of the request to discontinue POTS. Although Verizon has represented that impacted POTS customers will not be deprived of reasonable replacement service, there is insufficient detail about the type of replacements and about when and how the replacement options would be presented to the customers. The type of replacement service matters not only for the critical purpose of ensuring customers' access to reasonable and adequate service, but also because issues regarding the Commission's jurisdiction could be implicated.

Because the FCC process does not include an avenue for the Commission to conduct an investigation into Verizon's Application, the Commission has set a meeting with Verizon to get more information before determining next steps. At the meeting and in the days ahead, the Commission will work to verify whether the following representations that Verizon made to notified customers are accurate:

(1) customers will not experience any service interruptions;
(2) customers will have the ability to keep their current phone number;
(3) essential services like 911, alarm systems, and medical devices will not be impacted in any transition; and
(4) service reliability will be maintained

The Commission will also be seeking further information about the costs associated with service replacement options to gauge how it may impact customers' access to telephone service. Additionally, I want to note that only a little over one year ago, on September 11, 2025, the Commission approved a joint settlement permitting Verizon to acquire the parent company of Frontier Communications.[7] I mention this because the settlement required Verizon to undertake a series of commitments related to Frontier's copper wire service, and the Commission's review of Verizon's Application will necessarily consider any impact to those commitments.

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[6] Verizon's Application identifies these entities as including mobile wireless service from AT&T and T-Mobile, as well as from multiple broadband service providers such as Armstrong, Breezeline and Optimum.
[7] *Joint Application of Frontier Communications Parent et al. for Approvals Required Under the Public Utility Code for a Transfer of Control of Frontier Communications Parent, Inc. and its Pennsylvania Subsidiaries to Verizon Communications Inc.,* Docket No. A-2024-3051925 et al., Order entered September 11, 2025 (Approving Joint Petition for Approval of Settlement filed on June 17, 2025.

Because Verizon filed its Application under Section 63.71 of the FCC's rules,[8] it is seeking an automatic grant of the Application within 31 days of the date that the FCC publishes notice of Verizon's Application in the Federal Register, pending a comment period that typically lasts for only 15 days. This timeline is concerning, given the need for additional information. At the time that I prepared this testimony, the FCC had not yet published notice of Verizon's Application in the Federal Register to open the public comment period, but it is expected to be issued soon. The Commission continues to monitor the docket as it gains further information from Verizon and will stand ready to comment as warranted.

Conclusion

The Commission understands that Verizon has identified valid concerns about the copper wire infrastructure cost and reliability in seeking to discontinue POTS service. Nevertheless, there is insufficient information available to evaluate the impact upon Pennsylvanians' access to telephone service, and that is unacceptable. The Commission will remain vigilant and will carefully evaluate the actions necessary to ensure that Pennsylvanians do not lose access to adequate, reliable and affordable telephone service.

[8] 47 CFR § 63.71.