

News from the **Oklahoma Corporation Commission**

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A WIN FOR CONSUMERS, INDUSTRY

Commission approves new telecommunications rules with eye toward providing greater consumer choice

(Oklahoma City) - Some low-income Oklahomans would be able to make unlimited local cellular phone calls, telecommunications companies would be able to better tailor their various product offerings to consumers and businesses, and Oklahomans would have more choice when it comes to those offerings. Those are some of the expected benefits from new telecommunications rules approved today by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

Commission Chair Bob Anthony said as important as the new rules are, they are only part of an on-going process.

“When I first came to the Commission 16 years ago, there was only monopoly local telephone service,” noted Anthony. “A few years ago, the Commission developed what became known as ‘alternative regulation,’ based on the Commission’s desire for consumers to have a choice when it came to telecommunications services, choice that could only exist if there was true competition in the marketplace. Since that was put into place, we have seen positive changes in the marketplace. The rules changes approved today continue our effort to bring regulatory parity in order to foster further growth in the market, and thus, greater consumer choice.

“However, this is only an interim step,” Anthony continued. “The Commission should move forward with the Legislature’s request to conduct a careful study of the state of telecommunications competition in Oklahoma, and based on that study and the inevitable technological changes that will occur, take whatever actions are necessary to further competition and consumer choice.”

Commission Vice-Chairman Jeff Cloud said the new rules package represents a sincere effort on the part of all the parties concerned.

“It’s an overused phrase, but to ‘level the playing field’ is exactly what this rulemaking was all about,” said Cloud. “There is no doubt that it has been a successful effort, made possible by the hard work of Commission staff and the willingness of most the parties involved to craft a compromise solution. We anticipate there will be a greater variety of so-called ‘bundles’, or packages of services, offered to both business and residential customers as a result of these rules.

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“However, I agree with Chairman Anthony that this is only an ‘interim step.’ The Commission may vote this Friday on a procedural schedule for a Commission study on telecommunications competition in Oklahoma, a study that is critical to determining what the next steps should be when it comes to more regulatory changes.”

Corporation Commissioner Denise Bode called the new rules “another step in the right direction.”

“Almost five years ago, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission began working with the state’s

telecommunications industry to streamline the regulatory process,” said Bode. “Our goal was to remove barriers that may prevent Oklahomans from tapping into the gold mine by the technological leaps in telecommunications. Today we continued down that path, by allowing packages of telecommunication services and business services to be more competitively priced, and by eliminating red tape and streamlining the process.

“In addition, these rules require that low-income Oklahomans who are part of the Lifeline program be offered unlimited local cellular phone service in areas where cellular companies are required to offer service in order to obtain federal universal service funds.

“We must continue to lead surrounding states in the area of telecommunications technology,” continued Bode. “The key is to continue to put in place regulatory changes that will encourage even greater investment in better and faster technology, while still protecting access for all Oklahomans.”

The new rules must be approved by the Oklahoma Legislature and the Governor.

****For more information on the Lifeline program, go to <http://www.occ.state.ok.us/MISC/LIFELINE.htm>**

*****The new telecommunications rules will be posted at www.occeweb.com**

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(All OCC advisories and news releases are available at the Commission web site www.occeweb.com)