

PRESS RELEASE

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OPC Seeks Immediate Ruling from the PSC on Verizon's Transition from Copper Wire to Fiber Optic Telephone Service

“OPC is not against the forward march of technology,” People’s Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye, said emphatically. OPC is asking the PSC to ensure that consumers continue to receive the protections and safeguards to which they are entitled as Verizon transitions from Copper Wire to Fiber Optic Telephone Service in the District of Columbia. “Progress and technological advancement, while desirable, cannot come at the expense of basic consumer rights,” she said.

The PSC initiated its investigation, Formal Case No. 1102, in response to complaints filed by District consumers alleging that Verizon was inadequately maintaining its copper network and engaging in coercive or misleading marketing and customer service practices in concert with its transition from regulated copper line telephone service, to FiOS, a fiber optics based system, entailing a suite of services that include Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP).

“Verizon has represented that consumers are simply confused or resistant to technology, but complainants to OPC represent a broad selection of consumers, from all income and education levels. Where there is confusion, Verizon must take responsibility for it, due to its failure to provide adequate disclosure to customers of the service and regulatory differences among switched copper service, switched fiber service and VOIP service,” stated the People’s Counsel.

“We are calling on the Commission to order Verizon to retrain its personnel and revise its internal operating procedures so they have the information needed to accurately answer consumer questions and to fully inform consumers about

important public safety issues such as the need for backup battery power and the responsibility for replacing backup batteries, which should be at no cost to customers for a warranty period of three years,” said Ms. Mattavous-Frye.

“I am not swayed by Verizon’s public statements that we should not be concerned; at this point there is ample evidence to suggest the contrary. Too many questions linger regarding whether Verizon’s fiber service is in all respects safe and adequate, whether Verizon is scaling back copper repairs to force customers onto its fiber network and whether Verizon is unreasonably blocking customers who want to return to or maintain copper wire service,” added Ms. Mattavous-Frye.

“Unanswered factual questions that warrant a formal evidentiary hearing remain, particularly around the issue of Verizon’s copper wire maintenance. I encourage the Commission to affirm its’ jurisdiction and to move to ensure that District Consumers are fully informed about the implications of shifting to fiber based serviced, unregulated VOIP service, or both,” said the People’s Counsel.

Please contact the Office of the People’s Counsel for more details on this case or other utility matters of concern.