

NEWS RELEASE

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DPUC Takes A “Byte” Out Of Consumer Protection!

The DPUC's decision deregulating IPTV today talks about a “byte being a byte,” meaning that AT&T's cable services are not “cable” but like the Internet, and so allows AT&T to completely escape the rules and regulations that provide consumer protection from redlining, as well as community support with public access programs.

The OCC will carefully review the final decision when it is released, but it is the OCC's intention to pursue all avenues of redress, including a petition for reconsideration at the DPUC, legislation, or state and federal judicial reviews, as necessary.

The OCC has argued for the past year that the DPUC should instead place consumer protection and public policy goals paramount. In response to our request, the DPUC has instead chosen winners and losers among income brackets and entire communities across Connecticut by allowing AT&T, a telephone company, to enter into providing cable television without the important rules or regulations providing consumer protections.

But, ATT's video service is not the Internet: to consumers, it is about providing familiar cable shows to your TV in your home. So, the OCC says “if it quacks like a duck, then it must be duck”: consumers don't care how TV shows get to their house. Consumers deserve reasonable prices, reliable service, and improved technology.

The DPUC's decision boils down to giving AT&T a special favor, at the expense of the market and consumers. The other phone company in Connecticut, Verizon, is already competing with cable companies and serving customers while ATT merely continues to litigate for freedom from consumer protection rules.

The OCC has supported competition in the state's telecommunications markets for decades and supports AT&T getting into this business today. However, by allowing only AT&T freedom from its obligations to the state's communities while continuing to impose them on the cable companies and Verizon, the DPUC is promoting the interests of only one company. That isn't about competition!

AT&T's idea has been mocked in Congress by a Republican committee chair from AT&T's home state of Texas, who called the idea "silly" and publicly declared that AT&T is a "cable operator" and that it should be regulated as one.

The DPUC "expects" AT&T to follow the consumer protection rules for cable television, but judging by the amount of money AT&T has spent to avoid those obligations, the OCC doesn't think that's likely. The DPUC should reverse its decision before damage is inflicted on the state's consumers, revenues, and telecommunications market.