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## Public Service Commission Affirms Need for Consumer Protections during Verizon Transition from Copper to Fiber

On Tuesday, August 25, 2015, the PSC issued its long-awaited decision in the case that would determine a number of new rules governing the manner in which Verizon transitions its customers from copper and fiber-based services to FiOS (a service currently not regulated by the PSC) in the District of Columbia. "*This is truly a victory for consumers*" said People's Counsel, Sandra Mattavous-Frye.  "*It is clear from the Commission's decision that it heard the concerns of consumers and established a comprehensive set of requirements to protect consumer choice. The overall impact of the PSC's order is that it confirmed that protecting consumers is a core goal that cannot be set aside or ignored as Verizon transitions from copper to fiber technology*."

The PSC opened its proceeding to investigate Verizon's transition from copper to fiber services after consumers complained about the way Verizon was marketing its fiber and FiOS Digital Voice services ("FDV").  Often consumers felt forced to switch to services that were not only different, but in several respects, inferior to copper.

The order also outlined other additional benefits for consumers. Specifically, Verizon was ordered to amend its welcome kits and customer service scripts to include information about the battery backup unit ("BBU") as well as disclose that FiOS voice service is not regulated by the Public Service Commission. The PSC also ordered Verizon to require its technicians to obtain documentation of a customer's choice regarding the installation of a BBU if the customer agreed to migrate his or her service to fiber facilities.

The PSC will also establish a new rulemaking proceeding to set standards for battery backup that will apply to all telecommunication service providers offering local exchange service.  People's Counsel Mattavous-Frye noted, "*The PSCs determination that fiber-based service must include the same capabilities and functionalities as copper-based service, including access to power from the central office or through a BBU, makes it clear that all DC telecommunications consumers are entitled to receive equitable treatment.*"

**The Office of the People's Counsel is an independent agency of the District of Columbia Government representing energy and telecommunications services customers**

"*I am pleased with the PSC's ruling, ensuring that Verizon must continue to allow customers the option to retain or return to copper facilities, if they so choose. Consumer choice is critical*" said the People's Counsel. This important consumer protection remains in place for as long as Verizon's current Price Cap Settlement Agreement is in effect or until the PSC orders otherwise.

The PSC also found that in some instances, Verizon's fiber-based service and FiOS (fiber digital voice service) did not provide the same or better call and response capabilities for emergency services, crisis management, priority access, and security services requiring battery backup. "*The PSC's conclusions confirm what OPC found during this case—that emergency calls made from Verizon's FiOS service are not the same as calls made from Verizon's emergency copper and fiber-based services,*" the People's Counsel stated.

The People's Counsel concluded "*the importance of the PSC's decisions and their impact on consumers, whether they continue with Verizon's copper service or opt for its fiber-based services, cannot be overemphasized. OPC will carefully review the PSC's order to ensure consumer interests are protected and to determine the next steps.*"