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CPUC Proposal Requires AT&T to Remain Carrier of Last Resort & Preserve Landlines

On May 10, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) issued a proposed decision to dismiss AT&T's application to withdraw as Carrier of Last Resort (COLR), requiring AT&T to continue to provide landline telephone service to all customers in its territory in California. CPUC also proposed to open up a new policy proceeding to update COLR obligations to provide basic phone service given technological advances. CPUC proposed decision & press release attached.

"I expect the Commissioners to vote to dismiss AT&T's application to abandon its obligations to provide basic phone service, because no other carriers answered the CPUC call to indicate interest in serving as Carrier of Last Resort."

— Regina Costa, TURN Telecommunications Policy Director.

"What AT&T really wants is to stop providing essential telecom service to 99% of its service area, without providing a shred of evidence that there are real alternatives. This includes many areas threatened by wildfires, earthquakes, floods and power shutoffs. If AT&T gets its wish, it would significantly jeopardize public safety. AT&T's proposal is cynical and diabolical, and the CPUC is right to stop it in its tracks."

— Regina Costa, TURN Telecommunications Policy Director.

5,000 residents, from across the state, submitted written comments to the CPUC, expressing their concerns about losing landline phone service that they depend upon to reach first responders in times of emergency. And nearly 6,000 California residents attended at least one of eight Public Forums held across the state, either in-person, or virtually, to share how critical it is for them, and for their communities, to retain landline phone service. The proposed decision quoted extensively from comments provided by the public.

The earliest that the CPUC Commissioner may vote to dismiss AT&T's application to withdraw as Carrier of Last Resort, is at their June 20, 2024 Public Meeting. In the meantime, TURN fully expects AT&T to mount a vigorous campaign directed at the Commissioners, the Legislature, and the media, in hopes of convincing the Commissioners to keep AT&T's dreams alive, of abandoning landline service in California.