

August 12, 2025

Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

RE: Assembly Bill 470

I was very alarmed to read the article in Sunday's Times Standard regarding ATT taking its fight over land lines, carrier of last resort (COLR) and copper wiring to the State Legislature.

It seems that AB470 has passed the Assembly and is now before the state Senate appropriations committee.

This matter seems to me to be becoming a David and Goliath matter.

I am very much concerned that if this Bill passes the Senate what will happen to people living in remote areas of not only Humboldt County but those areas throughout the State of California where cell phones are useless.

In case of a natural disaster, even in the Eureka area, cell phones become useless and the "good old" landline becomes the only source of communicating to the "outside" world.

I left a phone message with our State

Senator, Mike McGuire, yesterday and hope he receives it.

I imagine that each of you supervisors have areas in your districts where cell phones are useless.

My husband and I lived full time in south western Humboldt County for a period of time and know just how isolating it can be when there is an emergency. You simply cannot go out your front door and yell for help when your closest neighbor may be a mile or more away.

I thank you for your time.

I have copies of my public comment as well as the newspaper article for each of you.

Respectfully

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AT&T takes fight over landline requirement to the Legislature

Utility finds better reception among lawmakers

By Ethan Baron
Bay Area News Group

Telecommunications giant AT&T, stymied last year by regulators in its bid to drop land-line service to California customers, is taking its battle to the state Legislature.

And so far, the reception is much improved.

Assembly Bill 470 would allow the company, which provides the vast majority of the state's landline service, to drop most of those customers, including nearly all of the hundreds of thousands in the Bay Area and millions around the state. It easily passed a floor vote in the Assembly in late June, and is now before the state Senate's appropriations committee.

Berkeley hills resident Cynthia Larson, 63, an author who does not own a cell phone, is worried. "To me the landline is irreplaceable," she said.

Even if Larson started using a cell phone, a fire or other natural disaster could disrupt internet and cell service, leaving her cut off from vital information. "Do I need to evacuate the house right now? Is the fire com-

ing here right now? The landline is the standard for reliable communications. How many people is it OK to kill through this lunacy?" she asked.

Because of its earlier monopoly status and state law requiring voice communications for all who want them, AT&T is for much of California the "carrier of last resort" or COLR — the utility required to provide phone service to anyone wanting it in its service area, unless another provider takes over the legal obligation.

The bill aims to replace aging copper-wire landlines with phone service from cellular and cable providers. It would also force AT&T to significantly expand California fiber-based internet and phone service — with half the expansion in areas with poor internet and phone service — in exchange for breaking free of its obligations as a carrier of last resort under state law.

"Right now we have 5% of Californians still using their copper lines," said Southern California Assembly Member Tina McKinnor, the bill's author. "Most of that is an older population. When we no longer have them with us, like my parents, we probably won't be 5%. We have to build up our infrastructure. There's no mandate making any other company build the fiber."

Last year, the California Pub-

lic Utilities Commission unanimously shot down a massively unpopular proposal by AT&T to scrap landline service for most of the Bay Area and much of California. Critics charged the pull-back would have stripped many older people and rural residents of a communications lifeline in power outages and disasters such as fires and floods.

Now, the utility, which reported \$12.3 billion in profit last year, even though it says its carrier-of-last-resort status costs it \$1 billion a year, is banking on AB 470.

"It most definitely is an end run around the PUC," said Regina Costa, telecom policy director at The Utility Reform Network, a San Francisco-based consumer advocacy group opposed to the bill.

AT&T's president for California Susan Santana pledged in a statement late last month that "no customer will be left without access to voice or 911 service." If AB 470 passes, the company will work with state leaders and residents "on policies that create a thoughtful transition to bring more reliable, modern communications to all Californians," Santana said. AT&T would move away from landlines in a "phased, multi-year approach, and "current copper services will be maintained until new technologies are avail-

able that are equally or more reliable," the company said.

AT&T has found support for AB 470 among business and community groups and public officials, including San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan. His office did not respond to questions about his support for the bill, listed in the most recent legislative analysis of the proposed law.

The bill would let AT&T end landline coverage in areas deemed "well served" because they have three alternatives for basic voice phone service, including a provider of wire-based service such as cable, and a provider that offers the Lifeline discount service for low-income households. In most areas, two of the alternatives would likely be cell phone services.

McKinnor, whose campaign for the 2026 election received a \$5,500 donation from AT&T according to state records, introduced the bill in February. A spokesperson for McKinnor said campaign donations "have no impact on legislation that Assemblymember McKinnor either authors or takes a position on."

McKinnor said the bill would "create the largest union-built private investment in advanced fiber optic networks in state history and will ensure that all California households will continue

to be able to make affordable, reliable telephone calls and connect with emergency services when they need it." McKinnor noted that during fires, landline customers cannot receive evacuation notices via text message.

A dozen Bay Area assembly members voted for the bill. South Bay Assembly Member Patrick Ahrens said the bill "contains protections ensuring that no one will go without access to telephone service and improves public safety by making significant investments in public infrastructure."

Assembly Member Gail Pellerin, whose district includes forested areas of Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties where many residents rely on landlines, declined to vote on the bill. Pellerin said in a statement she is focused on ensuring her constitu-

ents, "especially those in areas where internet service is not reliable, are not left without access to a landline should we remove COLR obligations." Pellerin said that at the time of the votes she "felt there was a discrepancy between the intent of the bill and the actual real-life applicability."

If AB 470 passes, the California Public Utilities Commission would have to adopt a map designating well-served areas by Dec. 15, 2026. But TURN's Costa argues federal government maps to be used in creating the commission's map show areas where cable and wireless broadband are present, but millions of Californians there lack broadband and reliable cell service. Companies will not be required to provide service to every home, Costa said.

A requirement for backup power for cellular or cable-based phone services applies only to fire-risk areas, despite California's history with floods

and earthquakes, and loop-holes mean many locations could still lose phone service during power outages, Costa said.

Customers losing landlines could face higher costs from purveyors of alternative services, according to a report last month to the state Senate's committee on energy, utilities and communications.

"Nothing limits these providers from raising their rates after a telephone corporation relinquishes its COLR duties," the report said.

For customers in purportedly well-served areas who lose landlines and can't secure an alternative, the Public Utilities Commission would have to confirm the absence of options.

"There is no way that people will understand what's going on," Costa said, "and there's no way that the commission has the resources to go out and verify throughout the entire state where there are verified alternative services."