

SB 1381 Spells Bad News For Illinois Consumers

AARP Concerned About Impact of Legislation on Affordable and Reliable Landline Phone Services in Illinois; Association Urges House to Oppose Statement by AARP Illinois Director of Advocacy Ryan Gruenenfelder

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill., May 25, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- "The passage yesterday of Senate Bill 1381 in the Upper Chamber of the General Assembly spells bad news for over 1 million Illinois consumers – including older residents, small businesses, working families, individuals dealing with health issues that require constant monitoring, and residents of rural areas – as it threatens the availability of reliable landline telephone services, it could deprive vulnerable consumers of critical connections to emergency services, such as 911 and medical monitoring devices, and opens the door to further utility rate increases in our state.

Even with recent amendments, SB 1381 and its House version, HB 2691 still do not address the main issues of providing consumers with affordable and reliable options as home telephone service transitions to other technologies and platforms. Recent wireless 911 outages show that telecommunications companies have yet to offer a viable alternative for a significant number of customers.

Landline telephone service allows residents to have reliable access to emergency services; it provides individuals whose health depends on monitoring devices to connect and send information to their health care providers; it helps low-income families to connect with job opportunities; it helps small businesses to stay in business and connect with new opportunities and customers; and it allows older residents and residents in rural areas to stay connected to family, friends, and neighbors, as well as vital services. Furthermore, the legislation saves callers millions of dollars by having access to affordable calling plans.

Without further amendments that also ensure state regulatory oversight, as telecommunications companies continue working on deregulating the industry at the federal and state level, it will be much harder to restore any safety nets for consumers. Forcing people onto alternatives, such as wireless or computer-based phone service, could subject them to higher bills, lack of service in extended power outages, spotty reception and dropped calls, advocates said. In March, for example, a wireless 911 outage hit AT&T wireless customers in 14 other states for about five hours, forcing police departments to urge people to call alternative numbers in an emergency.

In light of recent announcements about an upcoming increase in energy rates in Illinois we also express our strong concern that legislation such as SB 1381 constitutes yet another attempt by the Legislature to help highly profitable corporations increase their revenues on the backs of consumers, while at the same time limiting choices and affordability.

On behalf of our 1.7 million Illinois members, we urge the House of Representatives to oppose SB 1381/HB 2691 and we ask consumers to contact their legislators right now using our toll-free hotline, **1-844-220-5552**, and urge them to oppose these bills."

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