

MODERNIZING ALASKA'S TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION

Many of Alaska's current telecom statutes have not been updated since 1990, two years before dial-up, the most antiquated form of commercial internet service, was available to the public. How consumers communicate has changed dramatically during this time. Consumers' demand for landline phones has decreased drastically while their use of wireless service, social media, text messaging and other platforms to communicate grows. After 30 years, it's time Alaska updates the statutes for this century

SERVICE IN RURAL AREAS WILL CONTINUE

Updating telecom legislation also provides an opportunity to modernize Alaska's Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligations – a concept applicable in a monopoly market.

Here are some myths to dispel about the effect of changes to Alaska's current COLR regulations:

MYTH: The Alaska Regulatory Commission needs COLR regulations to ensure voice telephone providers do not abandon rural locations that are costly to serve.

FACT: Proposed legislation ensures consumers still have access to telecommunications in all areas served today. The Commission retains its statutory authority to decide whether a carrier can discontinue telecommunications service in a location, and the FCC retains oversight of service to existing customers.

MYTH: The COLR obligations are focused on rural locations with only one facilities-based provider.

FACT: The interexchange carrier ("IXC") COLR obligation applies throughout the entire state. In Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, the only way to eliminate the obligation is to engage in a costly and unpredictable process at the Commission.

MYTH: Carriers should not have any concerns with the Alaska Regulatory Commission's COLR regulations if it does not plan to abandon consumers in rural locations.

FACT: The COLR requirements create uncertainty for carriers and have recently been applied in an inconsistent and confusing manner. This is further complicated by the Commission's obligations, which can be changed at any time.

We can reform Alaska's telecommunications laws and policies to ensure Alaskans stay connected while avoiding the regulatory inconsistency that discourages investment in next-generation communication services.

It's time to update Alaska's telecommunications policy to help ensure the state is not falling behind the lower 48.