**Nation’s State Utility Consumer Advocates**

Fight to Preserve Telephone Competition Columbus, OH. – November 20, 2002 – Since the passage of the Telecommunications Act in 1996, years of work have been dedicated to the creation and support of competitive local telephone markets. The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) has passed a resolution that will be submitted to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) urging it to preserve competition by keeping the very system that has made customer choice a reality in many states.

As part of the FCC’s three-year review of how competitors access the local telephone network, the nation’s largest telephone companies are urging the agency to eliminate the unbundled network element platform (UNE-P). The UNE-P was established in recognition that competitors could not be expected to replicate existing networks and infrastructure. The system permits competitors to lease facilities needed to serve its customers at wholesale rates. It also allows companies to customize the services they offer to customers.

Nationwide, millions of consumers are served by competitors that rely on the UNE-P to affordably and seamlessly switch customers. Without this process, local telephone companies would manually disconnect and reconnect each customer, a costly and time-consuming method.

For customers of competitors, this could mean:

* Higher monthly telephone bills Less choices in the variety of services offered
* Potential service interruptions during the disconnection/reconnection process
* Less choices in the variety of services offered

Ultimately, competitors could be forced to exit local telephone markets across the country, leaving consumers with few, if any, choices.

“With competitive local telephone markets still developing across the nation, the largest telephone companies are trying to create barriers to customer choice,” said NASUCA President, Robert S, Tongren. “Any action taken to eliminate this system could shut down competition as we know it.”

In addition, NASUCA believes that any review of mechanisms that competitors rely on to provide service is best conducted on a state-by-state, market-by-market basis.