**FCC rules mean critical decisions now rest with state regulators**

**COLUMBUS, OH, August 22, 2003** -- ***Editors Note:*** *Late yesterday, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an order addressing the circumstances under which competitors can continue to access local telephone companies' networks. The following statement can be attributed to Robert S. Tongren, President of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates and Ohio Consumers' Counsel.*

"Through its order, the FCC has told state regulators the ball is in their court. It is now up to the states to determine whether the wholesale pricing platform will remain. These decisions will either allow competition to prosper or kill telephone choice altogether. There will be intense debate and lobbying efforts. As consumer advocates, we will work at the state level as we have at the FCC to ensure that competitors have access to the local telephone network. Only then can we be certain that competition will grow and continue to benefit homes and businesses across the country.

"However, consumers have the right to be disappointed that the FCC's decision will severely limit their choice of broadband providers. Based on the FCC's order, the obligation for local telephone companies to share the high-speed portion of their network with competitors will be eliminated within three years. Even sooner, competitors will be denied access to fiber loops in the local network, impacting their ability to serve existing and potential customers with service packages that include broadband. With more residential and small business customers relying on high-speed connections for the Internet and voice communications, federal regulators have put up a giant barrier to broadband competition."

**About NASUCA**

The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) is an association of 42 advocate offices. Members are designated by laws of their respective states to represent the interests of utility consumers before state and federal regulators and in the courts.