



Contact: Terry Etter
Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
(614) 466-7964

Consumer advocates detail steps needed to protect personal information

Silver Spring, MD – April 28, 2005 – The national group of state utility consumer advocates is calling on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to do all it can to safeguard information telecommunication companies acquire about their customers as it considers proposed rules to increase security of the information.

The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) is urging the FCC to consider five basic principles while protecting personal consumer information – notice, choice, security, access and enforcement. The principles will give consumers more control over how their information is handed out.

“It is extremely important that the FCC adopt rules that protect personal information while giving consumers complete control over their own data,” said David Bergmann, chairman of the NASUCA telecommunications committee and assistant consumers’ counsel with the Office of the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel. “The current rules are not getting that job done.”

NASUCA has outlined how the FCC should approach its proposed rules in comments it filed today. The principles include:

- Giving notice to affected customers before any personal information is disclosed. The notice should explain what type of information is being collected; how it will be used; who are the potential recipients; and the precautions that will be taken to protect the information.
- Providing consumers full control over whether their personal information is released and how it will be disclosed. Consumers also must have authority and choice in how the information is distributed to third parties. A “no release” option would give consumers more control and protect individuals like domestic violence victims and law enforcement personnel.

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- Requiring companies to take all necessary steps to ensure any information distributed is accurate and secure, with safeguards to protect against loss and unauthorized access, use or disclosure.
- Allowing consumers access to their personal information and the ability to correct any errors.
- Requiring company-specific and industrywide enforcement to ensure companies follow proper collection, use, security and access procedures. The periodic destruction of personal information by telecommunications companies should be a part of the standards for additional protections.

NASUCA's comments were in response to the FCC's notice of proposed rule-making that will examine the measures used by telecommunications companies to protect consumer information. The proceeding was initiated because of recent revelations regarding the use of customer information by unauthorized third parties, especially data brokers.

About NASUCA

The National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) is an association of 44 consumer advocates in 42 states and the District of Columbia. NASUCA's members are designated by the laws of their respective jurisdictions to represent the interests of utility consumers before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

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