

Public Utilities Commission adopts telecom rule changes

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) issued its written order Monday, Dec. 17 adopting telecommunications rule changes that will both protect Colorado consumers and allow them to have the benefits of a competitive marketplace.

The PUC, in deliberations late last month, approved changes that recognize the technological and competitive changes in an evolving industry. The new rules set a policy framework for reducing regulation on basic voice service in areas found to have effective competition. Subsidies for basic voice service in competitive areas will be eliminated, unless a telecom provider can demonstrate a continued need for support.

The rules changes are the result of a lengthy process of public hearings and soliciting input from telecom providers and customers. The PUC will begin a review in early 2013 to determine where effective competition exists for basic telecommunications services across the state. That proceeding is expected to continue at least through the first six months of the year.

The PUC stated that a starting point for determining whether effective competition exists in a geographic area is the presence of multiple providers of basic voice service. Other factors, contained in Colorado law, also will be considered, including the extent of economic, technological or other barriers to market entry; the ability of consumers to obtain service from other providers at reasonable and comparable rates, on comparable terms and under comparable conditions; and the ability of any provider to affect prices or deter competition.

In areas that have effective competition, retail rate regulation for basic service will be removed. The PUC will retain jurisdiction over E-911 emergency services. Areas that do not have effective competition will remain fully regulated.

In its rules, the PUC made permanent a \$54 million cap on the state high cost fund, which had been temporarily in place for the previous six months.

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