

H.898

Introduced by Committee on Energy and Digital Infrastructure

Date:

Subject: Telecommunications; telephone service; copper-to-fiber network  
transitions; VoIP service; backup power; consumer protections

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish  
consumer protections related to a legacy telephone company's transition from  
a copper-based network to a fiber-based network and, in addition, to establish  
reporting requirements designed to inform State policy with regard to ensuring  
all telephone customers have continuous and reliable access to emergency  
services.

An act relating to copper-based to fiber-based telecommunications network  
transitions and consumer protections

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 30 V.S.A. § 227f is added to read:

§ 227f. TRANSITION FROM COPPER-BASED TO FIBER-BASED  
TELEPHONE SERVICE; CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

(a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

(1) When a telecommunications carrier transitions its infrastructure from  
a copper-based network to a fiber-based network, it is critical to ensure that

1 existing customers have continued access to high-quality, reliable  
2 telecommunications service.

3 (2) The transition to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service over a  
4 fiber-based network may affect service reliability, consumer choices, and  
5 access to emergency services, particularly for vulnerable populations,  
6 including older adults and those with medical dependencies.

7 (3) Unlike traditional service over a self-powered copper-based  
8 network—otherwise known as plain old telephone service or POTS—a fiber-  
9 based service relies upon an optical network terminal (ONT), which must be  
10 connected to a power source or outlet at a customer’s home or business in  
11 order to be operational.

12 (4) In the event of a power outage, most backup batteries connected to  
13 the ONT will provide VoIP service for up to eight hours; however, backup  
14 power systems that provide service for a longer duration are also available.

15 (5) Previously, federal regulations had required providers of facilities-  
16 based, fixed, residential voice services that are not line powered, such as VoIP  
17 service, to offer for sale at least one option with eight hours of standby backup  
18 power, as well as an additional 24-hour option, to ensure customer equipment  
19 maintained E-911 access during a power outage. However, those requirements  
20 were sunset by operation of law on September 1, 2025.

1           (6) There is a need for clear customer safeguards to ensure continuous  
2           and reliable service during the transition to and in the provision of VoIP  
3           service and for enhanced State oversight of customer access to emergency  
4           services, generally.

5           (b) Intent. It is the intent of the General Assembly to balance telephone  
6           network modernization with customer safeguards during a copper-to-fiber  
7           network transition and to enhance State oversight with regard to ensuring that  
8           all telephone customers have continuous and reliable access to emergency  
9           services.

10          (c) Definition. As used in this section, "VoIP service" means an  
11          interconnected, facilities-based, fixed, residential voice service that is not line  
12          powered.

13          (d) Notice of network transition. A telecommunications carrier proposing  
14          to transition from a copper-based network to a fiber-based network in its  
15          service territory shall provide written notice by U.S. first-class mail and email  
16          to the Commissioner of Public Service, the E-911 Board, and all affected  
17          customers at least 120 days, 60 days, and 30 days prior to the planned  
18          transition. In a form and manner prescribed by the Commissioner, the notice  
19          shall include:

- 1           (1) the date the transition is expected to occur;
- 2           (2) the details of service changes, including any potential impact on a  
3           customer's telephone service and whether the carrier will offer a reasonably  
4           comparable replacement service in relation to pricing, terms, and conditions;
- 5           (3) information sufficient to inform customers about the need to test and  
6           verify any auxiliary telecommunications devices, such as alarm systems and  
7           medical alert devices, to ensure they function properly over the new VoIP  
8           service;
- 9           (4) disclosures about whether the carrier is obligated to provide  
10          regulated landline voice service to residential customers in its service territory;
- 11          (5) information on the need for and availability of backup power options  
12          and battery backup devices to maintain service continuity during a power  
13          outage;
- 14          (6) a link to the consumer protection rules in Public Utility Commission  
15          Rule 7.600, Standards for Billing, Credit and Collections, and Customer  
16          Information for Telecommunications Carriers, which includes a Consumer Bill  
17          of Rights;
- 18          (7) contact information for carrier customer support and for the Division  
19          of Consumer Affairs and Public Information within the Department of Public  
20          Service;

1           (8) information regarding the availability of and eligibility for any  
2           federal, State, or carrier discount programs applicable to the replacement VoIP  
3           service; and

4           (9) any other disclosures deemed necessary and appropriate by the  
5           Commissioner of Public Service to ensure that the public convenience and  
6           necessity will not be adversely affected by the transition or discontinuance of  
7           service.

8           (e) VoIP service provider reporting. Beginning on or before November 1,  
9           2026, and annually thereafter, each VoIP service provider shall file a report  
10           with the Department of Public Service detailing the number of customers who  
11           have purchased battery backup systems from the carrier, including the  
12           purchase and installation costs, if applicable; and documenting any known  
13           incidents where E-911 access was impaired or interrupted due to the lack of  
14           backup power.

15           (f) Enforcement. A telecommunications carrier that violates a provision of  
16           this section shall be subject to the remedies authorized by this title, including  
17           penalties authorized by section 30 of this title and injunctions authorized by  
18           section 209 of this title.

19           (g) Department monitoring. In addition to reviewing the annual reports  
20           required under subsection (e) of this section, the Commissioner of Public  
21           Service shall review, quarterly, the outage reports submitted to the E-911

1 Board pursuant to the Board's Rule Governing Outage Reporting  
2 Requirements for Originating Carriers and Electric Power Companies, as well  
3 as the Department's telecommunications service availability data and any other  
4 relevant data available to the Commissioner, to determine if there are areas of  
5 the State particularly prone to carrier or power outages and assess whether  
6 locations in those areas may be vulnerable to extended periods of time without  
7 access to E-911 service. In addition, the Commissioner, in coordination with  
8 the Office of the Attorney General, shall establish a mechanism for receiving  
9 and tracking any consumer complaints concerning VoIP service quality and  
10 reliability.

11 (h) Consumer education and outreach. The Commissioner shall develop  
12 consumer education and community outreach initiatives designed to ensure:

13 (1) all customers impacted by the transition from a copper-based  
14 network to a fiber-based network are aware of their rights and the carrier's  
15 obligations during the transition; and

16 (2) all customers who use VoIP service are aware of the risks and best  
17 practices concerning emergency preparedness in the event of a power outage.

18 (i) Department report. The Commissioner shall include in the  
19 Commissioner's annual report to the General Assembly findings and  
20 recommendations related to the implementation and enforcement of this

1 section. In the 2027 report only, the Commissioner shall consider and make  
2 recommendations on:

3 (1) whether the State should establish a program designed to provide  
4 financial assistance to customers with low income for costs associated with the  
5 purchase and installation of backup power equipment; and

6 (2) whether the State should enact additional backup power obligations  
7 applicable to VoIP service providers.

8 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE; APPLICATION

9 This act shall take effect on passage and shall apply to all  
10 telecommunications carriers on September 1, 2026.