

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 network
8 – otherwise known as plain old telephone service or POTS – a fiber-based
9 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 to offer for
17 sale at least one option with eight hours of standby backup power, as well as an
18 additional 24-hour option, to ensure customer equipment maintained E-911
19 access during a power outage. However, those requirements were sunset by
20 operation of law on September 1, 2025.

1 (6) There is a need for clear consumer protections that ensure adequate
2 notice, reliable service, and the availability of backup power solutions during
3 the transition to and in the provision of VoIP service.

4 (b) Intent. It is the intent of the General Assembly to protect Vermont
5 customers during a copper-to-fiber network transition and to ensure that VoIP
6 service providers meet minimum backup power requirements necessary to
7 ensure continuity of E-911 service.

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

11 (d) Notice of network transition. A telecommunications carrier proposing
12 to transition from a copper-based network to a fiber-based network in its
13 service territory shall provide written notice by first-class mail and electronic
14 mail to the Commissioner of Public Service, the E-911 Board, and to all
15 affected customers at least ~~120 90 days, 60 days,~~ and 30 days prior to the
16 planned transition. In a form and manner prescribed by the Commissioner, the
17 notice shall include:

18 (1) the date the transition is expected to occur;

19 (2) the details of service changes, including any potential impacts to
20 impact on a customer’s current telephone service and broadband service, as

1 ~~applicable~~ and whether the carrier will offer a reasonably comparable
2 ~~replacement service in relation to pricing, terms, and conditions.~~

3 (3) ~~information sufficient to inform customers on the need to test and~~
4 ~~verify any auxiliary telecommunications devices (such as alarm systems and~~
5 ~~Life Alert) to ensure they function properly over their new VoIP service; need~~
6 ~~to be tested and verified upon the transition; instructions for customers on how~~
7 ~~to transition their service to VoIP service or alternative services, including~~
8 ~~information and technical support for customers seeking to continue home~~
9 ~~monitoring equipment, such as a security system, medical equipment, or other~~
10 ~~equipment that relies upon telephone service to function properly;~~

11 (4) ~~disclosures about the carrier’s obligation to provide regulated~~
12 ~~landline voice service to all residential customers in its service territory,~~
13 ~~including its obligation to provide a calling plan at the same price as offered~~
14 ~~prior to the transition, unless a customer voluntarily chooses to make service~~
15 ~~changes;~~

16 (5) ~~information on the need for and~~ availability of backup power options
17 ~~and battery backup devices to ensure each customer can maintain service~~
18 ~~continuity during a power outage, including clear information on the~~
19 ~~availability, costs, and installation procedures for battery backup systems;~~

1 (6) a ~~brief summary of and~~ link to the consumer protection rules in
2 Public Utility Commission Rule 7.600 (standards for billing, credit and
3 collections) and Rule 7.605 (consumer bill of rights);

4 (7) contact information for carrier customer support and for the Division
5 of Consumer Affairs and Public Information within the Department of Public
6 Service;

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

10 (9) any other disclosures deemed necessary and appropriate by the
11 Commissioner of Public Service and consistent with the purpose of this section
12 to ensure that the public convenience and necessity will not be adversely
13 affected by the [transition or discontinuance] of service.

14 (e) VoIP service provider reporting. Beginning on or before November 1,
15 2026, and annually thereafter, each VoIP service provider shall file a report
16 with the Department of Public Service detailing the number of customers who
17 have purchased battery backup systems from the carrier and the cost of battery
18 backup options offered to customers, if applicable; and documenting any
19 known incidents where E-911 access was impaired due to the lack of backup
20 power. [DPS recommends striking this subsection.]

1 (f) Enforcement. A telecommunications carrier that violates a provision of
2 this section shall be subject to the remedies authorized by this title, including
3 penalties authorized by section 30 of this title and injunctions authorized by
4 section 209 of this title.

5 (g) Department monitoring. [HEDI/TBD; DPS recommends striking
6 this subsection.] In addition to reviewing the annual reports required under
7 subsection (e) of this section, the Commissioner of Public Service shall review,
8 quarterly, the outage reports submitted to the E-911 Board pursuant to the
9 Board’s Rule Governing Outage Reporting Requirements for Originating
10 Carriers and Electric Power Companies and the Department’s
11 telecommunications service availability data to determine if there are areas of
12 the State particularly prone to carrier or power outages and assess whether
13 locations in those areas may be vulnerable to extended periods of time without
14 access to E-911 service. have access to facilities-based, fixed voice service that
15 is line powered or to voice service offered by a Commercial Mobile Radio
16 Service provider. In addition, the Commissioner, in coordination with the
17 Office of the Attorney General, shall establish a mechanism for receiving and
18 tracking any consumer complaints concerning VoIP service quality and
19 reliability.

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

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

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

6 (i) Department report. The Commissioner shall include in the
7 Commissioner’s annual report to the General Assembly findings and
8 recommendations related to the implementation and enforcement of this
9 section. [DPS recommends striking the remainder of this subsection.] In
10 the 2027 report, only, the Commissioner shall consider and make
11 recommendations on:

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

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

17 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE; APPLICATION

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