

CONSUMER PROTECTION IN THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SECTOR IN THE BAHAMAS

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Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA)

- Regulator and competition authority with responsibility for the electronic communications sector in The Bahamas.
- Services regulated include all forms of electronic communications (fixed line and mobile services), including pay TV (cable TV) and broadcasting services (radio and free-to-air television).



Consumer Protection Regulations

- Issued pursuant to s.45(2) of the Communications Act, 2009
- Rules for licensees providing electronic communications services to the public for commercial gain.
 - ✓ Fixed line telephone services
 - ✓ Mobile services (including SMS and MMS messaging)
 - ✓ Broadband and dialup internet services
 - ✓ Pay TV services



Objectives

- Establish framework to ensure consumers benefit from the highest possible standards of service provided by licensees in the Electronic Communications Sector (ECS) in The Bahamas
- To achieve the Government's ECS Policy objectives in s.4 of the Communications Act, 2009 to further the interests of consumers by promoting competition; and
- To promote a high level of consumer confidence in service delivery from licensees



Key Features

- Feature areas include:
 - Consumer Sales, Contracts and Services
 - Billing and Credit Management
 - Consumer Complaints Handling
 - Customer Quality of Service Standards



Consumer Sales, Contracts & Services

- Description of services
- Pricing information
- Contract terms and Termination
- Security deposit



Billing and Credit Management

- Billing Practices
 - Service Providers to ensure that Bills are accurate and timely
 - Retention of Bills
 - Minimum information included:
 - Customer's name and address;
 - Service Provider's business name and contact info;
 - Bill/Customer Account reference number;
 - Billing period;
 - Description of charges;
 - Bill due date;
 - Contact info for Billing enquiries;
 - Contact info to lodge complaints; etc.



Billing Cont'd

- Itemisation of Charges
 - Customer to be provided with itemised details upon request
- Timeline for Issuance of Bills
 - Bills to be issued within 30 days of closure of billing period
- Timeliness of Billed charges
 - Bills to include current charges for each billing period
- Charging for Bills
 - Free of charge up to 12 months before request



Billing Cont'd

- Non-payment of Bills
 - Account restricted or 1st notification - 30 days
 - Account suspended or 2nd notification - 45 days
 - Account disconnected - 60 days or after exhaustion of security deposit
- Late payment and Reconnection Fees
 - Fees must be reasonable and proportionate



Consumer Complaints Handling

- Information to Consumers
 - Complaints handling procedures must be free to consumers
 - Complaints handling procedures must be made available on Service Providers' websites and at all retail outlets
- Complaints Management Process
 - Acknowledgement of complaints - 5 business days of receipt
 - Resolution of complaints - 30 business days
 - Escalation of complaints to URCA -after 30 business days



Customer Quality of Service (QoS) Standards

- Standards applicable to SMP Providers of fixed voice, high speed data services and connectivity, mobile voice and mobile data services and pay TV services



Customer QoS Standards Cont'd

- Customer QoS Standards
 - Approval of Application for Service
 - No more than two (2) Business Days
 - Service Activation after Approval
 - Fixed voice – five (5) – seven (7) Business Days
 - Mobile voice – one (1) working hour
 - High speed data – five (5) – seven (7) Business Days
 - Pay Tv – five (5) – ten (10) Business Days
 - Repeated Loss of Service
 - Faults not to reoccur within thirty (30) Days of repair
 - Fault Repair Time
 - From three (3) – five (5) Business Days
 - Wrongful Disconnection
 - Reconnection within four (4) working hours of notification
 - Reconnection after Disconnection for Non-payment
 - Reconnection within eight (8) working hours of acknowledgment of payment



Customer QoS Standards Cont'd

- Providers required to establish and publish compensation and refunds packages to consumers for standards not met
- Providers to submit QoS data to URCA quarterly



Thank You!

- Regulations available at www.urcabahamas.bs
- Visit URCA's page on Facebook: URCA Bahamas

