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Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 402

Frank Mathews, Admin. Director, Communications Workers of America, D4

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Good afternoon Chair Cupp, Vice-Chair Carfagna, Ranking Member Ashford, and members of the committee,

My name is Frank Mathews. I am Administrative Director of the Communications Workers of America, D4. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding House Bill 402 and its impact on basic wireline telephone service in Ohio. We are opposed to House Bill 402.

Let me say we agree 100% with the previous opposition testimony of The Ohio Poverty Law Center, Southeastern Ohio Legal Services and Pro Seniors Inc. They clearly laid out how HB 402 and its 20% increases in basic telephone service rates could harm many low-income Ohioans. And, the elimination of service quality standards for basic service would make the service they pay for less reliable.

In addition to those 2 arguments HB 402 also repeals PUCO approval for acquisitions and mergers regarding domestic telephone companies. PUCO and FCC oversight is essential. Time and time again it's been proven past mergers, deals and sales haven't always passed the smell test. Any safeguards you can build for Ohio's citizens and workers are crucial. Recent sub bill adjustments, to give the PUCO minor input in a very unusual set of circumstances may never be activated. The Ohio PUCO should be allowed to do its job on ALL cases of mergers and acquisitions.

The AT&T Representative's testimony included a long list of past telecom deregulation bills. The common thread in all these Bills was, a basic customer that depended on the Ohio Legislature for basic protections, was always protected.

In HB 402, Telecom companies are getting a huge freebie. Relieved of (BLES) customer service requirements, pricing restrictions and other responsibilities with absolutely no commitment of jobs, wireline buildout or assurances that because of poor service or high price, the Ohio (BLES) landline customer won't be forced off these lower cost lines, and end up forced to a higher priced product.

For these reasons, I urge you to not vote for House Bill 402. Thank you.

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