

I am writing to urge the WUTC to adopt rules requiring franchised telephone companies to offer the same service features to all its customers statewide.

We here in Ocean Shores have very primitive telephone features compared to most US West telephone exchanges, and I suspect that many smaller exchanges around the state are in a similar situation. Features that most urbanites take for granted, such as caller-id, call-waiting, and various other advanced telephonic features, are not available to us, apparently because the telephone company has no requirement or incentive to provide them. As consumers, we have no option of another telephone company. The "haves" seem oblivious or indifferent to our needs.

I realize that all features cannot be made available to everyone at once. But surely it is reasonable to set time limits without stifling innovation or imposing undue burdens on the companies. For example, a company might have a year to test-market a new feature in selected areas. If it decides to continue offering that feature, the company should then be required to offer that feature to all its customers statewide within, say, the following two years. I am not sure what the appropriate thresholds are; perhaps time limits should vary based on the investment involved. Keeping those features unavailable to certain customers for many years (perhaps forever), however, clearly is unfair to those denied equal access to modern telephony. The principle of universality should apply to more than simply the dial tone.

I sincerely hope that the WUTC sees its mission, at least in part, to make sure that all Washington residents are fully served by the companies it regulates, not just a privileged subset. That seems to be the situation today without rules such as those I suggest.

Thank you for your consideration.

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