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Powerful Coalition of Consumer Groups and Elected Officials Launch Campaign for High-Quality Phone and Internet Service across New York

Groups Seek Public Service Commission Reform of Declining Service, Disinvestment, Lack of Competitive Choices for New Yorkers

High-Quality Telecommunications Service Key to Economic Growth, Jobs

New York – 16 major consumer and labor organizations and a bi-partisan group of 75 elected officials announced today the formation of the Connect New York Coalition, a major new effort to reverse the decline in telephone service and ensure high-quality advanced telecommunications services for all New Yorkers. They filed a formal Petition with the Public Service Commission seeking a complete and public review of New York's telephone and telecommunications systems.

The Coalition described the current system as being in crisis and asked the Commission to convene a formal Proceeding to collect evidence of the current system's performance and shortcomings, and to adjust Commission policies to reflect the evidence.

“AARP is in full support of the request to have the New York Public Service Commission scrutinize our state's telecommunication system,” said **Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP in New York State**. “We need to ensure consumers have access to such a basic necessity, universal and high quality telecommunication service, at an affordable rate - anything less should be unacceptable to all New Yorkers.”

The evidence of deteriorating service is mounting. FCC data shows that New York is now third-worst in the nation in the number of households without telephone service. Rates for basic telephone service have increased over 500%, telephone companies have publicly stated their intent to disinvest in wireline telephone service, telephone companies have refused to expand their broadband services into most upstate cities and rural communities, and service quality has plummeted.

“Every New Yorker depends on quality telecommunications services. But for too many, quality is sorely lacking,” said **Chuck Bell, Programs Director for Consumers Union**. “We hope this petition will begin a process in which the PSC will make sure consumers get good service at an affordable price.”

“Any major shift in policy, such as the PSC's deregulation of telecommunication service twenty years ago, should be subjected to a fair and timely evaluation. Good government and good management practice, as well as common sense, demand it. The formal review which our groups seek is long overdue,” said Susan Lerner, **Executive Director of Common Cause/NY**.

The Coalition Petition seeks a formal, adversarial proceeding in which the Commission would gather evidence from parties and allow for cross-examination and counter-evidence. The Petition specifically asks to develop facts that would answer the following questions:

- A) How much do providers invest in the legacy systems? In the fiberoptic systems? In wireless systems?
- B) What are the actual costs and revenues for each system? What rates of return have been earned in the regulated system?
- C) What is the current level of service quality in all systems? How is it measured?
- D) Does competition exist? How many platforms are available to consumers? Is broadband being deployed?
- E) What has happened to rates/cost of service in each system?
- F) What services are technologically available for inclusion in a basic service list? What are public expectations? How are they measured?
- G) What percentage of New Yorkers do not have telephone service?

The Petition (which can be viewed at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/232125660/Connect-New-York-Coalition-Petition>) also seeks to examine a series of contentions about telephone service in New York including:

- (1) The Inadequacy of Commission-defined Required Basic Services
- (2) Changes in Regulatory Practice That Have Diminished Public Awareness and Public Participation and Which Have Led To Deterioration of Service And Increased Cost
- (3) Deterioration of The Quality of Service
- (4) Deterioration of The Physical Infrastructure
- (5) Misallocation of Costs among Verizon subsidiaries Leading To Excessive Rates
- (6) Systemic Failure Of The Availability Of Competitive Broadband Services

The Coalition pointed out the PSC has new leadership, and that the importance of affordable, high-quality universal service is a long-standing goal of the Commission. “We want to ensure that the PSC is actively working with the telephone companies and the public to improve the state's economy and offer better quality services to consumers. We are committed to working with local governments, our colleagues in the Legislature and the Governor to reverse the decline in telecommunications systems across the state,” said **Assemblymember Donna Lupardo**.

"Upstate cities need broadband systems that are state of the art and affordable. We don't have that now," said **Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner**. “The state's policies need to assure that every New Yorker has access to twenty-first century telecommunications.”

"Deregulation has led to enormous changes in the ways telecommunication services are provided throughout New York. It represented a major shift in policy that was intended to provide greater choice, affordability, and reliability for consumers,” said **Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh**. “Unfortunately, there is a lot of evidence and a strong sense among many New Yorkers that the systems and services have not lived up to this promise. That's why we're pushing for the Public Service Commission to undertake a formal review of these systems and the adequacy of its regulatory approach.”

Coalition members include (list in formation):

Groups

- AARP New York - Beth Finkel
- Citizen Action of New York - Bob Cohen
- Coalition For Economic Justice - Anna Falicov
- Consumers Union - Chuck Bell
- Common Cause/NY – Susan Lerner
- Communications Workers of America, District 1 – Chris Shelton
- Long Island Jobs with Justice - Anita Halasz
- Long Island Progressive Coalition - Lisa Tyson
- New York State AFL-CIO - Mario Cilento
- NY State Wide Senior Action Council - Gail Myers
- PUSH Buffalo – Aaron Bartley
- Rochester & Genesee Valley Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, James Bertolone, President
- Rochester Building & Construction Trades Council - Terence Moore
- NYS Working Families Party -- Bill Lipton
- Association of Retired Rochester Police & Area Law enforcement Retirees - Joseph Cimino, President
- NY Public Interest Research Group -- Russ Haven

Local Governments

- City of Albany - Kathy Sheehan, Mayor
- City of Kingston – Shayne Gallo, Mayor
- City of Newburgh - Judith Kennedy, Mayor
- City of Rochester – Lovely Warren, Mayor
- City of Syracuse - Stephanie Miner, Mayor
- Erie County Executive - Mark Poloncarz
- Suffolk County Executive - Steven Bellone
- Suffolk County Legislature - DuWayne Gregory, Presiding Officer
- Town of Babylon - Rich Schaffer, Supervisor
- Town of Monroe - Harley Doles, Supervisor
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Benjamin Boykin, II
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Catherine Borgia
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Peter Harckham
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Kenneth Jenkins
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Michael Kaplowitz, Chair
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Catherine Parker
- Westchester County Board of Legislators - Virginia Perez
- Town of Brookhaven – Edward P. Romaine, Town Supervisor

Assembly Members

- Hon. Thomas J. Abinanti
- Hon. Didi Barrett
- Hon. Michael Benedetto
- Hon. Anthony Brindisi
- Hon. Harry B. Bronson

- Hon. Alec Brook-Krasny
- Hon. David Buchwald
- Hon. Kevin A. Cahill
- Hon. Karim Camara
- Hon. William Colton
- Hon. Marcos A. Crespo
- Hon. Steve Englebright
- Hon. Patricia Fahy
- Hon. Sandy Galef
- Hon. Deborah J. Glick
- Hon. Richard Gottfried
- Hon. Aileen M. Gunther
- Hon. Edward Hennessey
- Hon. Earlene Hooper
- Hon. Brian Kavanagh
- Hon. Charles D. Lavine
- Hon. Barbara Lifton
- Hon. Donna A. Lupardo
- Hon. Chad A. Lupinacci
- Hon. William B. Magnarelli
- Hon. Shelley Mayer
- Hon. John T. McDonald, III
- Hon. Walter T. Mosley
- Hon. Steven Otis
- Hon. Amy Paulin
- Hon. Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes
- Hon. Andrew P. Raia
- Hon. Phil Ramos
- Hon. Samuel D. Roberts
- Hon. Linda B. Rosenthal
- Hon. Addie J. Russell
- Hon. Sean Ryan
- Hon. Angelo Santabarbara
- Hon. Michelle Schimel
- Hon. Luis R. Sepúlveda
- Hon. Aravella Simotas
- Hon. Frank Skartados
- Hon. James Skoufis
- Hon. Michaelle C. Solages
- Hon. Phil Steck
- Hon. Al Stirpe
- Hon. Robert K. Sweeney
- Hon. Fred W. Thiele, Jr.
- Hon. Matthew Titone

State Senators

- Sen. Neil D. Breslin
- Sen. Martin Malavé Dilan
- Sen. Terry Gipson
- Sen. Timothy M. Kennedy
- Sen. George Latimer
- Sen. Ted O'Brien
- Sen. David J. Valesky

Members of Congress

- Rep. Tim Bishop

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