



# Real Possibilities

Testimony of John Erlingheuser  
AARP Connecticut  
Raised H.B. No. 6992  
Energy and Technology Committee  
March 17, 2015

On behalf of the over 600,000 members of AARP in Connecticut, I am here to testify on Raised House Bill 6992. This bill directs the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to open a docket to determine the feasibility of modernizing telecommunications service in Connecticut.

AARP feels that this bill is not necessary. Currently PURA can open a docket whenever it chooses to examine the regulations of our telecommunications services. The statement of purpose of the bill speaks to studying “modernizing telecommunications laws” which generally refers to deregulating copper wire landlines services and preempting any regulation of voice over internet protocol service (VOIP). If the general assembly goes forward with Raised House Bill 6992 it should include language that would require the PURA to prepare and submit a report to the Legislature after gathering critical market information and conducting their investigation in a contested proceeding.

AARP’s policy on telecommunications services supports efficient, transparent, and fair markets for consumers and ensuring protections that promote and safeguard their health, safety, and economic interests. We fully support the transition to state-of-the-art telecommunications networks, technological innovation, and economic development. We are hopeful that all citizens will be able to partake in the benefits that advancements in telecommunications service make possible. However, this is not possible if such services are priced beyond the means of average citizens or beyond the accountability of consumer protections designed to provide all citizens with access to essential telecommunications services.

The telecommunications industry is in a state of transition. Copper wires and the associated TDM (time division multiplexed) form of transmission are giving way to fiber networks and the use of packet-based transmission, such as Internet Protocol (IP). Carriers are also increasing their reliance on wireless transmission. Many new information services have developed and continue to develop which are of great benefit to consumers (including developments in telehealth, telemedicine, electronic commerce, electronic government, and communications services for people with disabilities). All consumers, including older customers who disproportionately maintain phone service through a traditional landline, should have reliable and affordable access to the benefits of these new networks, regardless of where they live. A market transition must guarantee universal, reliable, affordable, high quality access to voice and broadband services.

**The FCC also recognizes that data is needed to inform the transition process. Its Technology Transition proceeding aims to examine potential impacts on key network issues, including public safety, ubiquitous and affordable access, competition, and consumer protection. The findings from this proceeding will help to assure that transition to new technologies supports the health and safety functions that the current highly reliable landline network make possible. For these reasons, we are urging policymakers to refrain from allowing telephone corporations to abandon copper-based landline telephone systems and force customers to accept a wireless telecommunication system before the FCC issues its decision.**

**AARP is concerned about the reliability of the telecommunications network and the possible offering of alternative services that are unable to support health and safety systems, including medical monitoring systems, burglar alarms, and communications equipment for the hearing impaired and homebound elderly.**

**Any legislation that would examine telecommunications regulations should require that the PURA investigate and approve any actions taken by telephone service providers that would have an adverse effect on service. This legislation should require the PURA to investigate and report on the many complex issues raised by the actions of telecommunication corporations who seek to abandon copper-wire landline systems in favor of less reliable and affordable alternatives. It should also examine the feasibility of regulating VOIP services where the FCC or federal law has not expressly prohibited it.**