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Board of Supervisors

1195 Third St
Suite 310
Napa, CA 94559
www.countyofnapa.org

Main: (707) 253-4421
Fax: (707) 253-4176

Joelle Gallagher
Chair

March 12, 2024

The Honorable John Reynolds, Commissioner
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue,
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: AT&T California's Request for Relief of Carrier of Last Resort Obligation (Application 2-03-00)

Dear Commissioner Reynolds,

On behalf of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Napa, I write to express our strong opposition to the Application of Pacific Bell Telephone Company d/b/a AT&T California (AT&T) for Targeted Relief from its Carrier of Last Resort Obligation and Certain Associated Tariff Obligations (Application). Denial of the Application is warranted here because the Application is premature given current geographic limits to broadband coverage. Denial is also warranted because AT&T provides no alternate Carrier of Last Resort to fulfill its Plain Old Telephone Service obligations. Removal of this reliable and regulated form of telephone service will disproportionately impact rural, elderly, and low-income residents of Napa County. The removal of Plain Old Telephone Service to these populations where there is currently no broadband coverage severs their connection to the outside world and puts their lives at risk during disaster events when communication is most vital.

AT&T's application for relief does not specify any alternative service providers for the Plain Old Telephone Services (POTS) that AT&T currently provides. Removing AT&T as Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) as it requests would result in the complete loss of telephone service in certain areas of Napa County, including loss of access to 9-1-1 and 2-1-1 services. AT&T states that 99.9% of the territory from which it seeks to withdraw has at least one alternative voice provider. This is inaccurate. The CPUC's broadband map shows swaths of Napa County without broadband service, even at the lowest speeds. AT&T misstates the availability of alternatives, using the CPUC's definition of alternative availability for its own profit. Granting the Application will result in termination of POTS to the very residents who need it most and who have no alternatives available. Our residents, in numerous letters to the County, shared their lived experiences regarding the unreliability of cellular phone coverage in Napa County's rural and mountainous topography, particularly in times of disaster when cell towers are not functioning. Their experiences show that the use of a cell phone does not provide an adequate alternative for the affected population.

POTS is a critical lifeline for many of Napa County's rural, elderly, and low-income residents: it is a uniquely affordable, reliable, and regulated product for this population. AT&T has not provided evidence that the alternative services, if available, are also affordable or reliable. This is especially important given the high fire risk in the same areas most affected by the Application. Telephone access to 9-1-1 and family members is a matter of life and death during disaster.

AT&T has not provided sufficient information about the impacts on residents without access to broadband of its proposed relief, because to do so would show the Commission the very real danger posed to those residents in times of natural disaster when POTS is needed most. The County of Napa opposes granting the relief requested by AT&T under the current regulatory circumstances and given the current reach and reliability of non-POTS alternatives, urges that the CPUC deny the requested relief.

Sincerely,

Joelle Gallagher
Chair, Board of Supervisors
Napa County

Joelle Gallagher
District 1

Ryan Gregory
District 2

Anne Cottrell
District 3

Alfredo Pedroza
District 4

Belia Ramos
District 5