



Florida Public Service Commission

# Consumer Bulletin

Braulio L. Baez, Chairman



## NUMBER PORTABILITY

Among the promises of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was the creation of an environment in which consumers – business and residential – would not only have choices about service providers, but would have the ability to change carriers without interrupting service.

With the advent of local number portability, consumers may begin to see the promise of open competitive telephone markets come to fruition.

Local number portability refers to the ability of a consumer to change telephone service providers without having to change phone numbers, providing the consumer remains within the same geographic area. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) determined that forcing customers to change phone numbers each time consumers changed carriers could serve as a deterrent in a competitive market place. The FCC reasoned that for residential customers, notifying family, friends and key providers such as physicians of changes in a phone number might prove to be reason enough to stay with a carrier. For businesses, switching carriers could involve far greater expense, including changing stationery, business cards and notifying clients on a regional, national and international basis.

To make the transition from one carrier to another smoother, the FCC mandated number portability for wireline carriers first. In Florida, the three largest telephone service providers (BellSouth, Sprint and Verizon) implemented number portability in 1999. These carriers were permitted by the FCC to impose a monthly charge for five years to finance the upgrades to their networks to make number portability possible. That charge will disappear from Sprint customers bills in February 2004, from Verizon bills in March 2004 and from BellSouth bills in May 2004.

More recently, the FCC imposed the same number portability requirements on wireless carriers in the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas, and outside of those 100 metropolitan areas in six months. This means that by the middle of 2004, consumers should have the ability to change from one wireless carrier to another or change wireline service to a

wireless carrier and keep their existing phone number. The transition may come with a price tag because wireless carriers are permitted to charge a fee to cover their costs and these fees may vary by carrier.

### For consumers considering a switch, some thoughts to keep in mind:

- 1** Call the carrier to which you are considering switching your telephone service and advise them of your intention. The prospective new carrier should begin the process with your existing carrier.
- 2** Do not terminate service with your existing carrier without initiating service with a new carrier.
- 3** Consumers are responsible for any early termination fees that are included in a contract with an existing carrier.
- 4** For consumers moving wireline service to a wireless carrier, do not assume your existing long distance service moves with you. Check with the prospective new carrier about long distance service before initiating a change.

The FCC advises that for a wireless-to-wireless transfer, your phone number should work within a few hours of changing providers. For a wireline to wireless transfer the transition may take several business days to complete.

*(Note: The Metropolitan Statistical Areas in Florida where wireless-to-wireless number portability is mandatory immediately are Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater; Miami; West Palm Beach-Boca Raton; Jacksonville; Orlando; Ft. Lauderdale; and Sarasota-Bradenton.)*

**Braulio L. Baez is the Chairman of the Florida Public Service Commission. The PSC sets the rates regulated utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately owned.**