

Governor Quinn Signs Bill to Modernize Illinois Telecommunications Act

Written by William Palmisano
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New Law Will Help Create Jobs, Encourage Investment in New Technologies and Protect Consumers

CHICAGO – June 15, 2010. Governor Pat Quinn today signed a bill into law that overhauls and modernizes Illinois' outdated telecommunications law. The new law will continue protecting consumers, while creating jobs and encouraging private investment in new broadband and wireless technologies.

“Investment in broadband and wireless technology is a key to creating better jobs and providing unique educational opportunities across Illinois,” said Governor Quinn. “I am proud to sign this law to encourage private investment in these critical technologies, which will put more people to work and protect consumers.”

The Illinois Telecommunications Act was written in 1985 – well before the widespread use of cell phones and broadband Internet. Today, approximately 25 percent of Illinois households rely only on cell phones.

The new law eliminates obsolete regulatory standards, which will enable telecom companies to shift more investment to wireless and broadband technologies. In Illinois, a 1 to 3 percent increase in broadband penetration would create 13,000 to 39,000 non-farm jobs, according to the Brookings Institution.

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Senate Bill 107, sponsored by Sen. Michael Bond (D-Grayslake) and Rep. Kevin A. McCarthy (D-Orland Park), allows telecommunications companies to opt-in to a new form of regulation that will promote more competition and encourage more investment in modern broadband and wireless technologies.

The new law also contains important consumer protections to ensure Illinois residents still have a variety of affordable phone service options. The law extends low-cost packages that are designed to protect consumers who still rely on landline service, but have varying communication needs. The low-cost package rates will be frozen for the next three years.

“One of the most important aspects of this legislation was that we have safeguards in place to protect consumers in Illinois,” said Sen. Bond. “We wanted to ensure that residents who still rely heavily on land-line telephone service will have affordable options to choose from. As we make strides to boost investment in cutting-edge technology, we want to make sure we are providing security for those individuals who rely on land-line phone service.”

“The signing of Senate Bill 107 considerably increases the possibility of greater private sector broadband investment in Illinois. The Legislature and the Governor’s Office worked diligently to make sure this legislation is a winner for consumer, providers and employers across Illinois. The unanimous support of the General Assembly confirms the positive changes this legislation promises for our state,” said Rep. McCarthy.

The Illinois Commerce Commission will retain the authority to impose penalties on providers who do not comply with general service quality requirements, which could amount to more than \$200,000 per offense for a provider. This legislation takes effect immediately.

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