

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6679

As of January 31, 2000

Title: An act relating to service standards for cable television subscribers.

Brief Description: Establishing service standards for cable television subscribers.

Sponsors: Senator Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Technology & Telecommunications: 2/1/2000.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, TECHNOLOGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: William Bridges (786-7424)

Background: The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has adopted guidelines to improve the quality of customer service rendered by cable operators. There are no federal penalties attached to violating the guidelines; enforcement is left to local franchising authorities.

Among other things, the FCC regulations establish guidelines for customer complaint lines and billing practices. For example, company representatives must respond to telephone complaints during normal business hours. If a telephone complaint is received after normal business hours, a company representative must respond within 24 hours. In addition, cable bills must be clear and concise, with a full itemization of services and charges. Written complaints about bills must be answered within 30 days.

The FCC has expressly permitted states and local franchising authorities to adopt stricter customer service standards.

Summary of Bill: Definitions. Various terms are defined, including cable service- and cable system.-

Subscriber Rights. Cable subscribers have the following rights: (1) clear and concise monthly billings that specify applicable charges, fees, and taxes; (2) quoted prices when requesting information about cable services; and (3) prompt responses to billing inquiries or complaints.

Billing Inquiries and Complaints. If a billing inquiry or complaint is made by telephone, cable operators must respond within 48 hours. If the inquiry or complaint is in writing, a response is required within two weeks of receipt.

Notice. Local franchise agreements must require cable operators to notify subscribers of their rights at the time they begin their subscriptions and at least once a year thereafter.

Remedies. Subscribers may enforce their rights under the Consumer Protection Act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2001.