

STAFF REPORT

City Council Business Item

DATE: February 20, 2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Shari Meads, Community Development Director

THROUGH: Merritt Perry, City Manager

SUBJECT: **Letter of Opposition to AT&T California’s Request for Relief From Carrier of Last Resort Obligation to the California Public Utilities Commission.**

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize Staff to submit a letter of opposition to AT&T California application A.23.03.003 for relief from Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligation to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

AT&T California (AT&T) has submitted an application to the CPUC for relief of Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) designation. As the COLR for a large part of rural California, AT&T must provide “Plain Old Telephone Service,” also known as POTS or landline phone service upon request.

Across California local governments, advocacy groups, emergency service providers, and residents are voicing opposition to AT&T’s application. The Council, recognizing the importance of POTS, directed staff to prepare a letter of opposition to AT&T’s application, which is included as Attachment A to this staff report. A map identifying areas within Humboldt County where AT&T seeks to withdraw COLR designation is included as Attachment B:

If the CPUC approves AT&T’s application:

- There would be no telephone provider obligated to provide service in AT&T’s local service area, even where cell coverage is inadequate.
- AT&T could decide to not provide landline service to customers as soon as six months after the application is granted.
- Customers could be required to pay more for telephone service, buy phone service as part of an expensive “bundle,” receive lower quality service, or depend on cell service (which is not reliable or available in some areas).
- Customers could lose the ability to maintain a landline due to inadequate cell service, or for use as emergency backup when there are cell phone network outages due to winter storms, wildfires, or other severe weather events or natural disasters.
- LifeLine or Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications (DDTP) customers may not be able to obtain those services. As a COLR, AT&T is legally required to provide low-cost telephone service to low-income households through the LifeLine program.

- If customers have special medical equipment or other technology (such as a fire alarm or security system), it may no longer function.

Staff recommends that the Council authorize staff to submit a letter of opposition to: AT&T California application A.23.03.003 for relief from Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligation to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

None.

RECOMMENDED COUNCIL ACTION:

Authorize staff to submit a letter of opposition to: AT&T California application A.23.03.003 for relief from Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligation to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Draft Letter of Opposition
- Attachment B – Map of Humboldt County areas where AT&T seeks to withdraw COLR designation