

Public witness testimony
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I have been customer of Century Link or its predecessor companies since 1977. In all that time, I have had very few problems with my landline telephone service at various homes in Utah. Recently, some experience with Century Link customer service has me concerned about the company's request to be relieved of obligations as a carrier of last resort. I share the concern of witnesses for the Division of Public Utilities and the Utah Rural Telecom Association that it is unclear if granting the request is in the public interest.

I would not have been aware of this docket had I not recently had a service outage and needed to contact Century Link. I became frustrated with the company's customer service system—both its website and the long wait for an agent. While on hold, I looked for a mailing address to register my dissatisfaction later. There was none on my recent bill. There was none on the company's website. I knew from my business experience that there would likely be a corporate mailing address on company filings at the Utah Public Service Commission, which is where I found an address, and this docket.

The outage was caused by a contractor for Farmington City installing underground fiber optic in our neighborhood, cutting underground telephone landlines. This occurred on or about Monday, Jan. 29, 2024. I did not notice it then because I was out of town on business. I reported the outage to Century Link on Thursday morning, Feb. 1. While I was waiting on the phone with customer service, my wife contacted our city officials and got contact information for the fiber optic contractor, who responded within an hour in person and promised to work with their contacts at Century Link.

It is difficult to navigate Century Link's automated process for handling service problems. At the time, I was fairly sure the fiber optic boring was the source of the interruption, but it took significant time to reach a person to report the problem. Even then, the scripts that customer service representatives are clearly instructed to follow proved frustrating and ponderous. I had to be a bit rude and interrupt the representative to get to the point and report the problem.

I have no complaints with the technicians who responded to fix the damage. They arrived within the stated appointment window and kept us informed of what they found and how long the repair might take. Later the following week, I saw a Century

Link employee up to his neck in a muddy hole, in the rain, fixing the damage. Service was restored the morning of Feb. 7. Still, it was nine days before service was restored.

Before this, in October, I went through the same frustrating process to report a loud hum on my landline that had begun a few weeks before and had become progressively worse until the line was unusable. The same difficulty was encountered. I followed the website process for reporting a service problem, but eventually had to go through the voice call option, on hold for significant time, to talk to an agent.

The repair was reasonably prompt and acceptable, but was possible primarily because, when we built the house in 1985, I paid a technician to wire the home with two twisted pair lines so I could have a business line and a home line (this was before wireless service was widely available). To remedy the hum, the Century Link employee simply used the other line by swapping it in our network interface. Actually, the hum is still there, but it is improved and the line is useable.

Because of my employment experience, I'm sensitive to the problems Century Link faces with shrinking market share and stranded investment. I urge caution by the Public Service Commission in responding to this request. I have service from Comcast/Xfinity and with Verizon Wireless and their customer service systems are equally frustrating.

In my recent experience with the company, I asked the technician (actually a Lumen employee) whether there were many customers in the area who still used a landline. He said there were more than 100, mostly older residents, who need it for voice services and access to 911. (I probably fall into the "older" category myself.)

After recently helping parents through their later years and end-of-life process, I have a heightened sensitivity for the services provided by Century Link and urge careful deliberation by the commission in ruling on this docket. Moreover, I would observe from my experience that there is no way that an elderly person with diminishing executive function could hope to navigate the customer service systems of any of the three telecommunication services mentioned here.

Our society is good at developing and embracing new technologies. But we are poor at helping people who are adversely affected by these changes. One need only look at the textile, steelmaking and automobile manufacturing industries in this county to see the reality and consequences of this failure. Our nation is in a crisis of confidence in our public institutions. The erosion of a blue-collar middle-class economy has made a large proportion of those citizens angry and despairing—to the point where, in their rage (misplaced though it may be), they are seriously considering dismantling public

institutions that they feel no longer work for them. They are even questioning our democracy itself.

Now, I certainly understand that the commission is limited in the scope of evidence it can consider in this proceeding. But I offer this view to say that a ruling in matters like this have much more at stake than the fortunes of just one company.