

Discontinuance of Landline Service

By law, a phone company *cannot* automatically discontinue providing landline service in an area without following certain state and federal requirements to allow it to do so. The Michigan Telecommunications Act (MTA) is the Michigan law which lays out the terms under which a provider of landline service in Michigan can discontinue providing service. An amendment to the law in 2014 relaxed some of the requirements that allow for a provider of landline service to discontinue that service. Effective January 1, 2017, Section 313 of the MTA allowed telephone companies to discontinue providing landline service by applying to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for approval to discontinue service under federal law and *after* noticing affected customers, interconnecting providers, and the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC).

What rights do customers and/or interconnecting carriers have?

Section 313 of the MTA allows a customer or interconnecting carrier of a provider that is proposing to discontinue service to request that the MPSC investigate the availability of “comparable voice service with reliable access to 9-1-1 and emergency services” for that customer or a customer of an interconnecting telecommunications provider. It also sets out a process for an MPSC investigation. If the investigation reveals a lack of availability of service, it allows the MPSC to conduct a request for service to identify a willing provider. If a willing provider cannot be identified, the MTA allows the MPSC to

require the existing provider to continue providing service until a willing provider is available. There are also federal notice requirements to customers and procedures that a provider must follow per the FCC in order to discontinue landline service or to replace it with an alternative service such as VoIP or wireless. The FCC has the authority to deny a provider’s request to discontinue offering landline service if a situation warrants it. Customers and interconnecting providers need to request to have the MPSC investigate.

If my landline carrier decides to discontinue service in my area, how do I find another carrier?

First, you should receive a letter from your provider advising you that it is planning to discontinue landline service in your area. That letter may identify alternative phone service providers in your area. The MPSC, through its partnership with Connect Michigan, has also developed maps and a database of providers in Michigan that provide service. Please visit: <http://map.connectmi.org/>

What can I do if I can’t find another carrier?

If you receive a notice from your provider that it intends to discontinue offering landline service in your area and there is no alternative carrier available, or you have concerns regarding the discontinuance, you should contact the MPSC to request that it investigate the availability of a comparable voice service provider with reliable access to 9-1-1 and emergency services. You may also contact the FCC, in addition to contacting the MPSC to voice your concerns.

Can I keep my old phone number when I find a new provider?

Yes, in most cases. The FCC's number portability rules still apply in discontinuances.

Where can I find additional information about discontinuance of landline service?

Link to the MPSC's website explaining the changes to Section 313: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mpsc/MTAsummary_453136_7.pdf

Link to the MTA – please see Section 313: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-179-of-1991.pdf>

The FCC's page on Federal Discontinuance of Service Requirements: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/domestic-section-214-discontinuance-service>

Link to the MPSC's frequently asked questions: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mpsc/Sec_313_Discontinuance_of_Landline_Service_FAQ_s_548826_7.pdf

Where can I find additional information if a carrier plans to replace my landline service with an alternative voice service using broadband or other technology?

Please view the following links on the FCC's website for further information:

<http://transition.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/tech-transitions.pdf>

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/tech-transitions-network-upgrades-may-affect-your-service>

If my current provider decides to replace my landline service with an alternative service using a new technology, will service be compatible with other devices in my house such as fax machines, home alarm systems, or medical monitoring devices?

While the existing services and rates that you are currently charged should not change, if you have concerns about whether your existing devices that rely on landline technology will continue to work if your service is transitioned to a service provided by a new technology, first please contact your provider with any questions. If the provider does not satisfy your concerns, please contact the MPSC and the FCC.

Will telephone service provided through broadband or wireless continue to work during a power outage?

Unlike landline telephone service, telephone service provided through broadband or wireless requires battery backup power in order to work during a power outage. The FCC requires that your provider notify you of this change in your service and to offer you the opportunity to purchase a battery backup for your phone for an additional charge. Batteries can also be purchased through other retailers.

How can I contact the MPSC or FCC regarding questions about discontinuance?

Please contact the Michigan Public Service Commission at 1-800-292-9555 and/or the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-CALL-FCC or visit the MPSC and FCC websites at www.michigan.gov/mpsc or www.fcc.gov.