

RESOLUTION NO. .

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

* * * * *

RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE APPLICATION BY PACIFIC BELL COMPANY D/B/A AT&T CALIFORNIA (AT&T) TO THE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION (CPUC) TO BE RELIEVED OF ITS CARRIER OF LAST RESORT (COLR) OBLIGATIONS

RESOLVED, by the Board of Supervisors of the County of San Mateo, State of California, that

WHEREAS, in March 2023, Pacific Bell Company d/b/a AT&T California (“AT&T”) submitted an application (Application No. A.23-03-003) to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) requesting to be relieved from its Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) obligations and other associated obligations; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to its COLR obligations, AT&T must provide traditional copper landline telephone service, commonly referred to as Plain Old Telephone Service (“POTS”), to any customer that requests it within a specific geographic area; and

WHEREAS, as the designated COLR in many parts of California, including San Mateo County, AT&T must also provide other critical basic telephone services, such as free access to 9-1-1 and telephone relay service, to all customers in the service territories in which AT&T is the COLR; and

WHEREAS, if AT&T’s application is approved, AT&T would no longer be required to offer POTS and other critical services throughout San Mateo County; and

WHEREAS, for many vulnerable residents living in rural and semi-rural areas of San Mateo County, the copper landline service provided by AT&T is the only reliable access to communications, particularly in emergency situations and during natural hazard events, such as storms, wildfires, and earthquakes; and

WHEREAS, AT&T's application to the CPUC does not adequately explain how alternative communications services will be identified and assessed if AT&T is no longer required to perform its COLR responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, the application also fails to explain how the reliability of such alternative services will be assessed and assured; and

WHEREAS, if the CPUC grants AT&T's application, there is no legal requirement that any other carrier assume AT&T's COLR obligations; and

WHEREAS, authorizing AT&T to relinquish its COLR obligations without a comprehensive plan in place to ensure consistently reliable telephone service would jeopardize the safety and well-being of consumers and residents throughout San Mateo County; and

WHEREAS, the reliability of potential alternative communication services to AT&T copper landlines, such as broadband internet and cellular services, for residents in rural and semirural areas in San Mateo County is dependent on the reliability of the local power grid in natural hazard events; and

WHEREAS, the power grid in rural and semirural San Mateo County is unreliable in natural hazard events, with outages in some areas extending greater than some seven days during outages over the last two years; and

WHEREAS, the State has faced several recent severe weather events that have resulted in power outages and the disruption of utility services throughout the Bay Area, including storms in San Mateo County during February 2024 that left as many as 74,000 customers without power; and

WHEREAS, the AT&T copper landline is powered at an origination source located at a great distance from the rural and semirural service area, allowing the AT&T copper landline to stay active in the event of a power outage, ensuring that basic telephone service remains generally unaffected, and providing consumers with a dependable form of communication; and

WHEREAS, in contrast, because the communication services available through a wireless cellular connection are dependent upon the backup power installed at cell sites, such services are far more likely to become inoperable during a power outage; and

WHEREAS, during extended power outages residents in rural and semirural San Mateo County cannot rely upon alternative communications methods such as broadband internet and cellular services due to the lack of power to operate the necessary equipment at the residents' homes; and

WHEREAS, there are some areas in rural and semi-rural San Mateo County that do not have any broadband internet or cellular service; and

WHEREAS, vulnerable populations, including seniors, those living with chronic and serious healthcare needs, and those with access and functional needs, living in urban areas in San Mateo County depend on copper landlines for their reliability in power outages; and

WHEREAS, if AT&T is allowed to terminate POTS services throughout San Mateo County, thousands of residents, including vulnerable populations such as seniors and those with access and functional needs, residing in areas with unreliable cell coverage could be put at risk; and

WHEREAS, in light of the foregoing and the need to ensure public safety and the health of vulnerable San Mateo County residents, this Board has determined that it must oppose AT&T's application to be relieved of its COLR obligations.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors hereby opposes AT&T's application to the CPUC for relief from AT&T's COLR obligations and directs the Clerk of the Board to transmit a copy of this Resolution to the CPUC and to other appropriate recipients and further directs the County Executive to take or to cause to be taken other appropriate actions consistent with this Resolution.

* * * * *