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OFFICE OF PEOPLE'S COUNSEL**

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**BILL NO.:** **House Bill 943**  
**Telephone Companies—Unpublished Telephone**  
**Number—One Time Charge**

**COMMITTEE:** **Economic Matters**

**HEARING DATE:** **February 22, 2018**

**SPONSORS:** **Delegate Saab *et al.***

**POSITION:** **Informational**

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House Bill 943 prohibits a telephone company from assessing more than a one-time charge to customers for keeping a telephone number unpublished. A new charge may be assessed each time a customer changes a telephone number.

There are customers who, for privacy or personal safety reasons, prefer to keep their telephone numbers from being published in telephone directories. “Unpublished” in the telephone company context means that the name, address and telephone number of a customer is not published in the directory, and the telephone number is not available from directory assistance. OPC is not aware of any company that waives a fee for non-published numbers for customers who may have protective or peace orders in place due to, for example, domestic violence or stalking.

Most “directories” today are on-line databases and a telephone company is not required to deliver a paper directory to an address unless a property owner or occupant specifically requests delivery.<sup>1</sup> Telephone companies have traditionally assessed a monthly fee to customers

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<sup>1</sup> See PUA §8-206.

who would like to keep their phone numbers out of telephone directories. For example, Verizon currently charges \$4.50 per month.<sup>2</sup>

Verizon and other telephone companies are not required to justify the reasonableness of the monthly charges to the Public Service Commission (PSC) under its current method of regulation and the Office of People's Counsel (OPC) has no way to verify whether the monthly charge imposed is in any way "cost-based." In fact, during the 2015 legislative session, the Maryland General Assembly passed House Bill 472<sup>3</sup>, which "de-tariffed" certain local phone services, including non-published directory services. For these services, companies need merely maintain up to date pricing guides. OPC suspects that with residential listings now completely digital, the cost of being included in, or excluded from, a directory is very small. Other than the few moments of labor involved with adding or removing a listing from a digital database there should be little cost to a company to honor a person's request for privacy.

More likely, the monthly charge imposed by companies to not publish customers' phone numbers represents the loss of revenue to the telephone company from providing access to those numbers to entities that make use of the telephone companies' extensive databases of numbers. As noted above, OPC does not have any access to information on whether this constitutes a significant revenue stream for telephone companies.

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<sup>2</sup> Verizon Maryland Inc. Product Guide, General Services, Part C, Section 4, Directory Listings, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Page 7, Effective May 20, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 250. See PUA §4-202(c).