



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **OFFICE OF CONSUMER COUNSEL LETTER CONCERNING CENTURYLINK – QWEST MERGER**

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) will consider approving Century Link's request to buy the much larger and Denver-based Qwest, the primary local phone provider in 14 western states. CenturyLink is a Monroe, LA based company which owns two rural telephone companies in Colorado.

The Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) has intervened in the current merger to protect the rights of residential, small business and agricultural consumers, and to make sure that the sale and merger are in the public interest. The Colorado PUC will hold a special hearing for the public to make comments on the merger at 4:00 p.m. on November 8th in its office at 1560 Broadway, Suite 250.

The OCC has intervened for three main reasons: 1) to make sure that the merger does not diminish consumer service quality, 2) that prices do not increase unreasonably for CenturyLink and Qwest customers, and 3) that surcharges to all Colorado telephone consumers do not increase as a result of this transaction.

In reviewing the merger proposal, the OCC found that some areas of Qwest's customer service have deteriorated since 2009. In particular, it is taking longer for Qwest to respond to customer service complaints. In addition, consumers are spending more time waiting for the company to answer their calls. We have made proposals in this merger case to improve customer service quality and have asked for financial penalties if service quality, such as customer response times, decreases.

My office also wants to ensure that problems experienced in the New England states and in Hawaii when similar smaller telephone companies acquired larger service territories are not repeated in Colorado. In those cases, the resulting merged companies had deteriorating customer service on many fronts and later filed for bankruptcy.

That is why the OCC will use next week's PUC hearing on the CenturyLink – Qwest merger to advocate on behalf of consumers that the merger be a benefit to all Coloradans, that prices do not increase unreasonably, and that service quality remains high. This is one way in which the OCC works to protect Colorado consumers.

Bill Levis, Consumer Counsel

*DORA is dedicated to preserving the integrity of the marketplace and is committed to promoting a fair and competitive business environment in Colorado. Consumer protection is our mission.*