



Town of Brookhaven
Long Island

Edward P. Romaine, Supervisor

July 17, 2015

Audrey Zibelman, Chair
NYS Dept. of Public Service
Three Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12223-1350

Re: Case 13-C-0197
Comp. Pol. File No. 1115

Dear Ms. Zibelman:

I am writing to state the Town of Brookhaven's concern at Verizon's refusal to complete the build-out of FiOS in our area and opposition to plans by Verizon to replace wire-based landlines with their wireless Voice Link service. We request that immediate action be taken regarding these issues.

Due to the evolution of technology, both broadband and telephone are services that should be treated as utilities, not left to the marketplace.

Too many areas are being bypassed by Verizon FiOS. Brookhaven – a Town with a population of 500,000 that is physically larger than Nassau County – is one of those areas. The lack of fiber optic service creates a digital divide. Those without fiber optic access are the clear losers.

Without FiOS, the result is a monopoly for the cable company. Brookhaven believes competition is good for the marketplace by bringing more choices and affordable options.

Office of the Supervisor

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Dozens of residents have contacted my office asking why the Town of Brookhaven is preventing Verizon from having a franchise agreement allowing them to subscribe to FIOS. The answer is simple – we aren't. For years, the Town of Brookhaven has maintained that we would welcome FIOS to submit an application for a franchise agreement. However, they have refused to commit to put the infrastructure in place that would provide this service for all of our residents.

Several years ago, Verizon Communications started a FIOS build in Brookhaven Town. That project has not been completed, however, preventing all residents from being able to access FIOS service. Brookhaven Town has attempted to contact Verizon numerous times about this, but have not received a response from the company.

In addition to failing to build out FiOS, Verizon is abandoning the existing copper network, which also destroys good jobs. Despite the PSC's claims to the contrary, Verizon copper service quality is terrible. That drives away customers.

Voice Link does not offer data service, so it cannot deliver the internet or other vital services. When customers who cannot get the proper repair that they should be getting are offered Voice Link, they are not given a true choice: they are effectively forced onto Voice Link.

Abandoning landlines in place of this wireless alternative will have a significant impact on Brookhaven residents, posing a risk they cannot afford to take. This wireless service would remove numerous features, functions and capabilities that had been available to our residents utilizing traditional landlines. By switching to Voice Link, our residents and businesses could find themselves without operating alarm systems, reliable communication during blackouts, or access to the 911 system. That simply cannot be allowed to happen.

The transition to Verizon's Voice Link service creates a host of issues for both Fire Island residents and local businesses. Voice Link is a voice only-product. Consequently, services like broadband, faxing, home medical monitoring and credit card processing go unsupported.

For more than a century, New York and federal regulators have required phone companies to provide traditional landline telephone service to all customers within their territory under a Universal Service policy. In doing this, the phone companies have received subsidies to serve customers in high-cost rural or remote areas, and provide service at reasonable rates.

Verizon's Voice Link is not a reasonable substitute for copper-based wireline services. Replacing landline networks with the wireless Voice Link service prevents residents and businesses from being able to use wire-dependent services such as fax machines, alarm systems, medical alert devices, and Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) Internet access. In many instances, there is no FiOS or cable modem Internet providers available, leaving those who rely on these services no alternative if switched to Voice Link. The wireless service may not be compatible with certain monitored home security systems, placing homes and businesses at greater risk from flooding by burst plumbing, fire or burglars.

While landline customers whose service is suspended for non-payment can still reach a 911 operator in emergencies, suspension of Voice Link stops all service. In addition, Voice Link's backup battery only allows a brief period of use during blackouts, when the need to communicate is critical – unlike landlines, which continue to function even when customers lose electric power.

Voice Link is not a reasonable substitute for copper-based wireline services, denying residents of a host of features and capabilities that they presently need for business, medical and emergency services and alarm systems. The impact of switching to this system would have an immediate and widespread impact on our residents. If you have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Edward P. Romaine
Supervisor, Town of Brookhaven