I am writing to urge to you to stop phone companies from imposing misleading charges on my monthly phone bill so I can truly compare prices of phone services. I support the petition filed by the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates and endorsed by other consumer advocacy organizations, including CU. This petition, CG Docket No. 04-208, Petition for Declaratory Ruling Regarding Truth-In-Billing and Billing Format, is long overdue. Many consumers feel as I do -- annoyed with a long list of new charges and frustrated with trying to compare prices when shopping for telecommunications service. Phone bills should be truthful, easy to read and easy to understand. Instead, the long distance and wireless bills are filled with surcharges with misleading names that imply the line items are mandated by law, when they are not. Because this practice is tolerated by the FCC, long distance and wireless phone companies are able to hide the true cost of servi! ce. These add-ons make the advertised price of service significantly less than the amount of the check I have to write each month to pay the bill. Competition will not work if consumers cannot accurately compare prices. For example, due to surcharges and fees, my monthly Verizon Wireless phone bill is between 15 and 20 percent more than the monthly rate I signed up for (which includes extras such as phone replacement insurance). Fifteen to twenty percent! Over the course of a single year, Verizon Wireless is charging me over $150 in surcharges. That's outrageous! If wireless providers' business models require them to "recover" the cost of government fees and taxes from their customers, then they should do what all businesses do: factor the costs into their advertised prices. As things currently are, it is as if I go to the grocery store to purchase a gallon of milk, which is marked, say, $2.25; yet, when the cashier rings up the milk at the register, I am told the !
price is actually just under $3, due to "surcharges" in addition to th e usual sales tax! This practice is blatant fraud, which no language in any service contract can smooth over. The FCC should immediately grant the NASUCA petition to investigate carrier practices related to line item charges on bills for wireline and wireless phone service; to declare certain practices in violation on the Commission's "Truth in Billing" Order and to prohibit carriers from imposing separate monthly fees, line items or surcharges unless expressly mandated by law or the charge is expressly authorized by a governmental authority.