

Summary of “A Conversation with Commissioner Clyburn” on Cell Phone Issues
Monday, January 25, 2010
Chula Vista, California
Civic Center Branch Library
6:00-7:30 p.m.

The following bullets encapsulate various concerns raised by consumers who attended an open forum hosted by Commissioner Clyburn in Chula Vista, CA, on January 25, 2010:

- Consumers want more and/or better information about the terms of their contracts, including what plans are available to them under the contract. It was mentioned that sometimes a consumer will see an advertised plan and not realize that there may be other plans available to them with lower monthly fee(s).
- Consumers need to know what early termination fees they will be charged if they decide to change plans or providers. For example, some consumers may be looking to lower their monthly cellular service charges especially if their income decreases. These consumers need better information about the differences of purchasing a lower cost plan, switching over to another provider who offers a better plan, or switching to a month-to-month plan before terminating their current service.
- Consumers need better information about what an authorized dealer is. Authorized dealers may operate out of retail space, such as big box stores, have a kiosk in a shopping mall, and/or sell handsets/service through websites.
 - Consumers stated that they are not aware of the difference between an authorized dealer and the carrier until there is an issue that needs to be resolved, such as a damaged handset. This is especially important when the terms of the contract determine for example where, if and/or when the phone can be repaired.
 - Consumers also complained that authorized dealers have their own early termination fees in addition to the providers’ fees. Thus, they are assessed two early termination fees if they cancel their contract prior to the contract’s expiration.
- Consumers need more information about and/or help understanding the charges on their monthly cellular service statement and who they can contact for more information. For example: A consumer notices that her monthly charge for this month is more than twice what she paid last month even though her usage pattern has not changed. When she calls the customer service line, she either is transferred to a manager or leaves a message that is not returned. The consumer pays the charges in order to keep her account current and have no Past Due charges and/or stops calling the customer service line out of frustration of not being assisted with her concerns. Various audience attendees suggested having the FCC work with local community-based organizations – perhaps teach representatives of these organizations how to work with consumers and/or file a complaint with the FCC on the consumer’s behalf.

- Many consumers were concerned when they learned from another audience member that some providers are automatically renewing annual or two-year contracts, and the notice is provided only in the consumer's monthly bill and that another ETF applies even when new equipment has not been purchased.
- Consumers need more information regarding the different providers, what type of network they use to provide services, what types of handsets are supported by the networks, coverage areas and other related information.
- Consumers need more information about texting and the various ways they can be charged for this including unlimited text plans, charge per message sent, charge per message received, number of texts, if any included in their plans, etc. This is an even greater concern to parents who had additional phones for their children all on the same contracts. One concerned parent suggested that the FCC work with service providers on blocking any texts that go above their agreed plan and/or having a better warning that they are close to or past their limit.
- Consumers expressed a concern that sometimes the agencies (local, state, federal) they contact may not have the authority to directly address a concern. For example, one consumer mentioned that she had contacted the California PUC (CPUC) about a concern. Though the staffer the consumer spoke to was helpful, the consumer learned that the CPUC had a limited authority on helping resolve the issues. (When asked by Commissioner Clyburn, the consumer did confirm that she was not aware that she could file a complaint with the FCC, and the Commissioner provided the information about filing a complaint with the FCC.)
- Consumers complained of being charged for international calls when they did not travel internationally. For those living near the border, sometimes a tower located in a neighboring country carries the calls, and the provider charges the international rates for such calls. This requires subscribers to carefully check their monthly bills and alert the provider to this issue repeatedly. Other consumers noted that international calling fraud is an issue—consumers are charged for calls they did not place.
- Consumers suggested that the Commission track consumer complaints to detect systemic issues that should be addressed.