

Assembly Bill No. 1104

CHAPTER 429

An act to amend Section 53088.2 of the Government Code, relating to video providers.

[Approved by Governor September 30, 2005. Filed with Secretary of State September 30, 2005.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1104, Levine. Video provider billing practices.

The existing Video Customer Service Act requires all video providers, as defined, to render bills that are accurate and understandable and to provide a minimum of 30 days' written notice before increasing rates or deleting channels.

This bill would require that a video provider cease charging a customer for services within 7 business days of receiving a request to terminate service. The bill would provide that if the customer requests that service be terminated and provides 7 or more business days notice before the date for termination of service, the video provider would be required to cease charging the customer for additional services as of midnight of the last day of service.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 53088.2 of the Government Code is amended to read:

53088.2. (a) Every video provider shall render reasonably efficient service, make repairs promptly, and interrupt service only as necessary.

(b) All video provider personnel contacting subscribers or potential subscribers outside the office of the provider shall be clearly identified as associated with the video provider.

(c) At the time of installation, and annually thereafter, all video providers shall provide to all customers a written notice of the programming offered, the prices for that programming, the provider's installation and customer service policies, and the name, address, and telephone number of the local franchising authority.

(d) All video providers shall have knowledgeable, qualified company representatives available to respond to customer telephone inquiries Monday to Friday, inclusive, excluding holidays, during normal business hours.

(e) All video providers shall provide to customers a toll-free or local telephone number for installation, and service, and complaint calls. These calls shall be answered promptly by the video providers. The city, county,

or city and county may establish standards for what constitutes promptness.

(f) All video providers shall render bills that are accurate and understandable.

(g) All video providers shall respond to a complete outage in a customer's service promptly. The response shall occur within 24 hours of the reporting of the outage to the provider, except in those situations beyond the reasonable control of the video provider. A video provider shall be deemed to respond to a complete outage when a company representative arrives at the outage location within 24 hours and begins to resolve the problem.

(h) All video providers shall provide a minimum of 30 days' written notice before increasing rates or deleting channels. All video providers shall make every reasonable effort to submit the notice to the city, county, or city and county in advance of the distribution to customers. The 30-day notice is waived if the increases in rates or deletion of channels were outside the control of the video provider. In those cases the video provider shall make reasonable efforts to provide customers with as much notice as possible.

(i) Every video provider shall allow every residential customer who pays his or her bill directly to the video provider at least 15 days from the date the bill for services is mailed to the customer, to pay the listed charges unless otherwise agreed to pursuant to a residential rental agreement establishing tenancy. Customer payments shall be posted promptly. No video provider may terminate residential service for nonpayment of a delinquent account unless the video provider furnishes notice of the delinquency and impending termination at least 15 days prior to the proposed termination. The notice shall be mailed, postage prepaid, to the customer to whom the service is billed. Notice shall not be mailed until the 16th day after the date the bill for services was mailed to the customer. The notice of delinquency and impending termination may be part of a billing statement. No video provider may assess a late fee any earlier than the 22nd day after the bill for service has been mailed.

(j) Every notice of termination of service pursuant to subdivision (i) shall include all of the following information:

- (1) The name and address of the customer whose account is delinquent.
- (2) The amount of the delinquency.
- (3) The date by which payment is required in order to avoid termination of service.

(4) The telephone number of a representative of the video provider who can provide additional information and handle complaints or initiate an investigation concerning the service and charges in question.

Service may only be terminated on days in which the customer can reach a representative of the video provider either in person or by telephone.

(k) Any service terminated without good cause shall be restored without charge for the service restoration. Good cause includes, but is not

limited to, failure to pay, payment by check for which there are insufficient funds, theft of service, abuse of equipment or system personnel, or other similar subscriber actions.

(l) A video provider shall cease charging a customer for services within seven business days of receiving a request to terminate service. If the customer requests that service be terminated and provides seven or more business day's notice before the date for termination of service, the video provider shall cease charging the customer for additional services as of midnight of the last day of service. Nothing in this subdivision shall prohibit a video provider from billing for charges incurred by the customer prior to the date for termination of service.

(m) All video providers shall issue requested refund checks promptly, but no later than 45 days following the resolution of any dispute, and following the return of the equipment supplied by the video provider, if service is terminated.

(n) All video providers shall issue security or customer deposit refund checks promptly, but no later than 45 days following the termination of service, less any deductions permitted by law.

(o) Video providers shall not disclose the name and address of a subscriber for commercial gain to be used in mailing lists or for other commercial purposes not reasonably related to the conduct of the businesses of the video providers or their affiliates, unless the video providers have provided to the subscriber a notice, separate or included in any other customer notice, that clearly and conspicuously describes the subscriber's ability to prohibit the disclosure. Video providers shall provide an address and telephone number for a local subscriber to use without toll charge to prevent disclosure of the subscriber's name and address.

(p) Disputes concerning the provisions of this article shall be resolved by the city, county, or city and county in which the customer resides. For video providers under Section 53066, the franchising authority shall resolve disputes. All other video providers shall register with the city in which they provide service or, where the customers reside in an unincorporated area, in the county in which they provide service. The registration shall include the name of the company, its address, its officers, telephone numbers, and customer service and complaint procedures. Counties and cities may charge these other video providers operating in the state a fee to cover the reasonable cost of administering this division.

(q) Nothing in this division limits any power of a city, county, or city and county or video provider to adopt and enforce service standards and consumer protection standards that exceed those established in this division.

(r) The legislative body of the city, county, or city and county, may, by ordinance, provide a schedule of penalties for the material breach by a video provider of subdivisions (a) to (p), inclusive. No monetary penalties shall be assessed for a material breach if the breach is out of the reasonable control of the video provider. Further, no monetary penalties may be

imposed prior to the effective date of this section. Any schedule of monetary penalties adopted pursuant to this section shall in no event exceed two hundred dollars (\$200) for each day of each material breach, not to exceed six hundred dollars (\$600) for each occurrence of material breach. However, if a material breach of any of subdivisions (a) to (p), inclusive, has occurred and the city, county, or city and county has provided notice and a fine or penalty has been assessed, in a subsequent material breach of the same nature occurring within 12 months, the penalties may be increased by the city, county, or city and county to a maximum of four hundred dollars (\$400) for each day of each material breach, not to exceed one thousand two hundred dollars (\$1,200) for each occurrence of the material breach. If a third or further material breach of the same nature occurs within those same 12 months, and the city, county, or city and county has provided notice and a fine or penalty has been assessed, the penalties may be increased to a maximum of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each day of each material breach, not to exceed three thousand dollars (\$3,000) for each occurrence of the material breach. With respect to video providers subject to a franchise or license, any monetary penalties assessed under this section shall be reduced dollar for dollar to the extent any liquidated damage or penalty provision of a current cable television ordinance, franchise contract, or license agreement imposes a monetary obligation upon a video provider for the same customer service failures, and no other monetary damages may be assessed. However, this section shall in no way affect the right of franchising authorities concerning assessment or renewal of a cable television franchise under the provisions of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 (47 U.S.C. Sec. 521 et seq.).

(s) If the legislative body of a city, county, or city and county adopts a schedule of monetary penalties pursuant to subdivision (q), the following procedures shall be followed:

(1) The city, county, or city and county shall give the video provider written notice of any alleged material breaches of the consumer service standards of this division and allow the video provider at least 30 days from receipt of the notice to remedy the specified breach.

(2) A material breach for the purposes of assessing penalties shall be deemed to have occurred for each day, following the expiration of the period specified in paragraph (1), that any material breach has not been remedied by the video provider, irrespective of the number of customers affected.

(t) Notwithstanding subdivision (o), or any other provision of law, this section shall not preclude a party affected by this section from utilizing any judicial remedy available to that party without regard to this section. Actions taken by a local legislative body, including a franchising authority, pursuant to this section shall not be binding upon a court of law.

For this purpose, a court of law may conduct de novo review of any issues presented.

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