

7-2000

Ratewatchers Phone Guide Vol. 6 July 2000

Maine Public Advocate Office

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/meopa_docs

Recommended Citation

Maine Public Advocate Office, "Ratewatchers Phone Guide Vol. 6 July 2000" (2000). *Public Advocate Office Documents*. Paper 14.
http://digitalmaine.com/meopa_docs/14

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the State Documents at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Advocate Office Documents by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.

STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC ADVOCATE OFFICE
112 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0112
TEL. 207-287-2445

E-mail: Wayne.R.Jortner@state.me.us
<http://janus.state.me.us/meopa>

RATEWATCHERS PHONE GUIDE

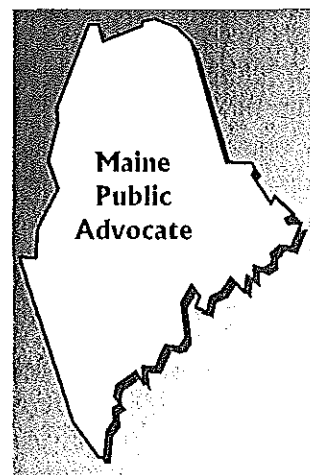
Volume 6

July 2000

Ratewatchers Guide

FCC RAISES RATES FOR ALL LOCAL TELEPHONE CUSTOMERS

On May 31, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission caved in to pressure from some of the largest local and long-distance telephone companies in the U.S., including Bell Atlantic and AT&T. As a result, the \$3.50 common line charge on your local bill will go up to \$4.35 immediately (July) and is likely to go up to \$6.50 within five years (\$7 for additional residential phone lines). The deal was great for telephone companies – long-distance companies will see big savings on access charges paid to local companies and local companies will get to increase charges to all consumers. While long-distance companies agreed to remove one of their surcharges, those charges were part of their rates and subject to competition. The increased line charge is not subject to competitive forces. The FCC raised local charges by billions of dollars without requiring local companies to provide any cost justification. The Public Advocate will oppose this decision through his affiliation with a national organization of utility consumer advocates.



THE BOTTOM LINE

As always, there's no single lowest-cost phone company for every customer. The places you call, the amount you call, the time you call, and the length of your calls determine the lowest-cost carrier for you. However, there are now two carriers that appear to offer the lowest-cost calling plans for the majority of residential customers in Maine who use at least a modest number of instate and interstate minutes each month.

GTC Telecom recently reduced its instate rate to 8 cents per minute. Combining that with its 5 cents per minute interstate rate (applicable at all times) and no monthly fee, GTC Telecom may be the lowest cost provider for most Maine customers.

One Star, however, is still a strong contender. Although its instate and interstate rates are somewhat higher than those of GTC, One Star offers 6-second billing for customers who spend more than \$20 per month, it offers one of the lowest billed calling card rates available, and a monthly fee of only 95¢ (waived when usage is over \$50).

For more adventurous callers willing to prepay by credit card over the Internet, we know of no cheaper way to make a call over the conventional telephone network than www.bigzoo.com - at 3.9 cents per minute with no additional monthly charges. For really adventurous callers who roam the Internet, it can't get any cheaper than www.dialpad.com and www.deltathree.com, which allow you to use your computer to make free calls over the Internet and connect with the normal telephone network on the receiving end. (See page 6.)

MAINE PUBLIC ADVOCATE'S NEW AUTOMATIC CALLING PLAN SELECTOR NOW AVAILABLE

The Maine Public Advocate has teamed up with abelltolls.com to provide Maine telephone customers with an automatic program that will choose the lowest cost calling plans after you provide your typical number of minutes of calling during various time periods in a given month. Just log onto the Public Advocate's website at <http://janus.state.me.us/meopa> and click on *Automatic Calling Plan Selector*. If you don't have access to the Internet, feel free to call our office and we will run the program for you. Currently, the program works for interstate rates only. However, we expect it to work for Maine instate long-distance rates by August. If you have any suggestions or questions about this new service, please contact the Public Advocate's office.

**PUBLIC ADVOCATE REQUESTS
FORMAL INVESTIGATION OF BELL
ATLANTIC'S RATES –
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION REFUSES**

In December, 2000, Bell Atlantic's first 5-year alternative regulation plan will expire. Under that plan, Bell Atlantic has had unprecedented pricing flexibility and its rates were determined annually based on the rate of inflation and the declining costs of providing service. Although toll rates and certain competitive service rates have declined and inflation has been very low, unusual factors have caused the Commission to allow local rates to rise by over 30% during the last few years. Under Maine law, the Commission is obligated to ensure that local customers do not pay more under this new price-cap form of regulation than they would under traditional regulation. Traditional regulation relies on rate cases and limits profits to a fair rate-of-return on investment.

In March, the Public Advocate filed a formal request with the Public Utilities Commission asking for a rate investigation of Bell Atlantic-Maine in order to determine a new "fair starting point" for the next few years and ensure that Maine's telephone customers are actually benefiting from the new form of regulation. The Public Advocate believes that Bell Atlantic's rates may be too high as a result of potentially large savings from the Bell Atlantic/NYNEX merger and other cost-savings and increased revenues.

In June, the Public Utilities Commission rejected the Public Advocate's request for a rate investigation of Bell Atlantic-Maine. The Commission cited rates in other states, its desire to provide incentives to Bell Atlantic, and increased prospects for competition in local telephone service, in its decision refusing to look at Bell Atlantic's actual costs and revenues. The Public Advocate strongly disagrees with the Commission's decision, because it fails to consider the

possibility that Bell Atlantic is over-earning or evidence indicating whether customers are being harmed by a new form of regulation that has been in place since 1995.

**DEALING WITH THE HIGH COST OF
DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE**

Directory assistance service prices have been steadily rising in recent years with charges as high as \$1.99 to get a single telephone number. Therefore, it pays to find ways to avoid using directory assistance whenever possible. One alternative is using the Internet. There are a number of Internet sites offering white and yellow page listings that search telephone numbers for free. For example, see the "people search" and "yellow pages" offered by www.yahoo.com, www.anywho.com, and, for business only, www.bigyellow.com. If you have a telephone number and want to know who it belongs to, you can even find a free reverse directory at www.reversephonedirectory.com.

If you don't have access to the Internet, another good way to avoid directory assistance is to request that Bell Atlantic provide you with directories of areas within the state of Maine free of charge. However, out-of-state directories can be quite expensive (the Boston book costs \$35.90 plus tax and shipping). To obtain those, you may want to ask a resident of another state to request one and send it to you.

If you do use directory assistance, the rates listed on pages 4 and 5 generally apply when you dial (area code) + 555-1212. Dialing Bell Atlantic's national 411 directory assistance will cost \$.95 and dialing AT&T's "00 info" will cost \$1.49 for an interstate number.

6-SECOND BILLING VERSUS 1-MINUTE BILLING – A BIG DEAL?

Maybe. Of the calling plans featured in this issue, all except one round up to the next full minute on each call. That means that if you talk for one minute plus six seconds, you pay for two minutes. One Star (for customers spending more than \$20 in usage) would bill that call as one minute plus 1/10 of a minute (6 seconds).

Applying a rate of 7 cents per minute to that 1.1 minute call, you would pay 8 cents with 6-second billing and 14 cents with full minute billing – 75% more. If you make many short calls, this difference can be substantial!

If you make few calls, this difference will be much less significant, even if you use many minutes. The Public Advocate's new **Automatic Calling Plan Selector** (see <http://janus.state.me.us/meopa>) automatically accounts for the difference in billing increments.

NEW FEDERAL UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUNDS WILL REDUCE LOCAL PHONE BILLS OF BELL ATLANTIC CUSTOMERS

Thanks to a new mechanism used by the Federal Communications Commission to allocate universal service funds to high cost areas, Bell Atlantic customers in Maine will benefit from over \$10.7 million in additional funding to make local rates more affordable. Bill credits will appear in local bills beginning this July. Residential customers in the most populous cities can expect a credit of \$1.50 per month, those in somewhat smaller cities will see a credit of \$1.00 per month and all others will see a credit of 23¢. Business customers will see credits of \$5.45, \$3.15 and 23¢ respectively. The purpose of this unequal allocation of benefits is to target more benefits to customers with the highest gaps between their local rates and the actual costs of serving them. The Public Advocate preferred that all customers receive an equal percentage reduction in rates but settled on a reduction of at least 23¢, which happens to offset a recent federal surcharge for local number portability – a service that currently benefits few residential customers in Maine. These new bill credits are not applicable to customers served by any of Maine's 23 rural independent local telephone companies.

SOME RATES NOT AVAILABLE TO CERTAIN CUSTOMERS

Not all rates and featured plans are available to customers served by independent (non-Bell Atlantic) local telephone companies. The Public Advocate has asked the PUC to address this problem.



UNINTENTIONAL TOLL CALLS – A GROWING PROBLEM IN THE AGE OF COMPUTERS AND CELL PHONES

Many customers have been unpleasantly surprised to find high long-distance charges for calls that they expected to be local and included in their flat monthly local rate. In Maine, dialing 7 digits can send your call anywhere in the state – therefore, you may not know whether a call will be charged as toll or local. However, individual customers have an option – a customer may call their local phone company to request that their line be programmed for 11 digit dialing for all toll calls. Then if you dial seven digits and the called party is beyond your local calling area, a recording will instruct you to dial 1207 to complete that toll call. Most Bell Atlantic telephone directories show your local calling area beginning on page 12.

Beware of the following pitfalls that have led many customers to get long-distance charges unexpectedly:

1. Calling beyond your local calling area but within your town – Some customers make calls within their own town that are not included in their local calling area. However, Municipal Calling Service allows those calls to be made without long-distance charges. If you use an instate long-distance provider other than Bell Atlantic, you must dial your local company's access code (Bell Atlantic's is 10-10-698), before the number to avoid a long-distance charge in order to use municipal calling service.
2. Long Distance Connection to the Internet - If you use the Internet, be certain that your computer is dialing a number within your local calling area. Internet service providers sometimes mistakenly provide numbers that are not local. When this happens, a customer can easily incur hundreds of dollars in toll charges after a month's worth of Internet use.
3. Calls to Wireless Numbers - Wireless services (cell phones, pagers) often use new three-digit prefixes that are designated for a particular local area. While your local phone directory lists the traditional three-digit prefixes within your local calling area (usually on pages 12 and 13), your telephone directory will generally not list prefixes designated for wireless services. If you don't know whether a given three-digit prefix is local or long-distance, you may call the Public Utilities Commission at 1-800-452-4699 and they will provide you with the local area designated for any particular three-digit code.
4. Premium versus Economy local calling areas - Many customers in Maine can choose between a smaller calling area at lower cost (economy) and a wider calling area at higher cost (premium). If you regularly make calls to the premium exchanges in your area, you will avoid long-distance charges by choosing the premium calling area. Do the math to see which option is more economical. If you're unsure about the boundaries of your economy and premium calling areas, call your local telephone company.

SAMPLING OF RESIDENTIAL TELEPHONE RATES AS OF JULY 2000

COMPANY FEATURED PLAN	AT&T* "One Rate 7¢ Plan" with 5¢ offpeak		Bell Atlantic "Pine Tree State Calling Plan"	Excel "Option B" "Simply 7"		GTC TELECOM		MCI/WorldCom "5¢ Everyday Plus"	
	Instate	Interstate	Instate Only***	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate
PER MINUTE RATE (including percentage-based surcharges)	8¢	7.6¢ peak 5.43¢ off-peak*	9¢	13¢	7¢	8¢*	5.3¢	08¢	7.6¢ peak 5.42¢ off-peak
Minimum	None		\$5.40*	None		None		None	
Monthly Fee	\$5.38*		None	\$6.15		None**		\$5.36	
CALLING CARD RATES			Regular rates of 5.6¢ to 45¢/minute depending on time and distance minus 25%			No Calling Card Service			
- Rate Per Minute	25¢	25¢		29¢	25¢			55¢	69¢
- Additional Charge Per Call	\$1/month	\$1/month	58¢	89¢	75¢	Not Applicable		89¢	\$1.25
DIR. ASSIST. CHARGE PER CALL	80¢	99¢	3¢ free - 40¢** each additional call	85¢	\$1.60	85¢	85¢	90¢	\$1.49
SAMPLE MONTHLY COSTS: Includes 50% intrate/50% interstate minutes (50% peak, 50% off-peak) and monthly fees. Totals do not include directory assistance, calling card calls or international calls.									
LOW @ 10 mins. per month	\$6.10		\$5.40***	\$7.15		66¢		\$6.09	
MEDIUM @ 100 mins. per month	\$12.63		\$9.00	\$16.15		\$6.65		\$12.61	
HIGH @ 500 mins. per month	\$41.67		\$45.00	\$56.15		\$33.24		\$41.61	
INTERNATIONAL RATES									
Canada	7.60¢	+ \$3/month	No International Rates	8¢	+ \$3/month + \$1.20 USF	12.71¢***	7.58¢ (5¢ wkend)	+ \$3/month	7.58¢ (5¢ wkend)
UK	10.86¢			10¢		13.77¢	10.83¢ (9¢ wkend)		
France	18.46¢			19¢		23.30¢	18.41¢ (9¢ wkend)		
Germany	18.46¢			19¢		23.30¢	18.41¢ (9¢ wkend)		
UNIVERSAL SERVICE CHARGE (included in listed per-minute rate)	8.6%		None - no interstate service	\$1.20/mon.		5.9%		8.3%	
To Subscribe, Call:	1(800)222-0300		1(800)585-4466	1(800)875-9235		1(800)486-4030		1(800)444-3333	
ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND ALTERNATIVE PLANS	Low-volume customers using AT&T should consider the "Nineteen Sense Plan" (19¢/minute) with no monthly fee or minimum. High volume users should consider AT&T's "One-Rate 5¢ Plan" (8¢/minute intrate) with a \$7.95 monthly fee. *Monthly fees drop by \$1 with on-line billing. **Must request 5¢ off-peak add-on.		*Low volume customers should consider Sensible Minute Plan at 15¢ per minute with no monthly minimum. **National 411 directory service is 95¢ per call. ***Totals do not reflect monthly costs associated with an interstate plan which is also required by most customers.	Three Penny Plan offers 3¢ evenings and 10¢ daytime for interstate calls and 13¢ for all intrate calls - monthly fee of \$7.15.		*GTC has not filed this rate with the Maine PUC as of June 15, 2000. However, GTC assures us that this rate is in effect. **Add \$1.95/month for paper billing. ***Lower rates available with \$3/mo. international plan. Note 5¢ rate drops to 4.75¢ if you sign up online with www.onlinechoice.com		Other plans are available including "MCI One Savings II" - 15¢/min interstate Mon.-Sat., 5¢ interstate on Sunday, 8¢/min. off-peak intrate (15¢ peak), no monthly fee and \$5 minimum, and "5¢ Everyday Savings," - 5¢/min. all evenings and weekends interstate, (15¢/min. daytime) for \$2.95/month, intrate 8¢ off-peak, 15¢ peak with \$5 minimum.	

NOTE: Per minute rates and monthly fees include the percentage surcharge applied by each company for "universal service charge." We have not added the access (PICC) surcharge because we expect it to be eliminated.

SAMPLING OF RESIDENTIAL TELEPHONE RATES AS OF JULY 2000

COMPANY FEATURED PLAN	One Star "Meridian A"		Qwest "5¢ Calling Plan" with online billing		Sprint "Nickel Night Anywhere"		VarTec "Fiveline Service"		Working Assets "7 Cent Round the Clock Plus"	
	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate
PER MINUTE RATE (including percentage-based surcharges)	8.4¢	7.4¢	12¢	5.34¢	10¢ day 5¢ night	10.84¢ day 5.42¢ night	5¢	5.25¢	10¢	7.41¢
Minimum	\$3.00		None		None		50¢ per call		None	
Monthly Fee	\$1.02*		\$5.29*		\$6.45*		None		\$5.24	
CALLING CARD RATES										
- Rate Per Minute	13.9¢		49¢		59¢		19¢/minute + \$1.95/month*		30¢	59¢
- Additional Charge Per Call			99¢		99¢				99¢	99¢
DIR. ASSIST. CHARGE PER CALL	\$1.25		\$1.40		\$1.50		75¢	95¢	\$1.40	
Includes 50% instate/50% interstate minutes (50% peak, 50% off-peak) and monthly fees. Totals do not include directory assistance, calling card calls or international calls.										
SAMPLE MONTHLY COSTS:	\$3.00		\$6.16		\$7.23		\$1.00 to \$5.12**		\$6.11	
LOW @ 10 mins. per month	\$8.92		\$13.96		\$14.26		\$5.12 to \$51.23**		\$13.95	
MEDIUM @ 100 mins. per month	\$40.53		\$48.65		\$45.52		\$25.61 to \$256.13**		\$48.77	
HIGH @ 500 mins. per month										
INTERNATIONAL RATES										
Canada	11.80¢	9.62¢	+ \$3/month		7.59¢	+ \$5.95/mo. waived if usage over \$30		5.25¢ (10 min. min.)	7.41¢	+ \$2/month
UK	10.73¢	10.69¢			9.76¢			10.49¢ (1 min. min.)	10.59¢	
France	16.10¢	17.10¢			16.26¢			12.59¢ (1 min. min.)	18.0¢	
Germany	15.02¢	17.10¢			16.26¢			12.59¢ (1 min. min.)	18.0¢	
UNIVERSAL SERVICE CHARGE (included in listed per-minute rate)	7.3%		6.85%		8.4%		4.9%		5.9%	
To Subscribe, Call:	1(800)482-0000		1(800)860-2255		1(800)746-3767		1(800)583-8811		1(800)788-8588	
ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND ALTERNATIVE PLANS	*No monthly fee if usage exceeds \$50.		*With credit card billing or online billing. Add \$3/month for paper billing.		High-volume users should consider "Sprint 1000" plans: >1000 interstate night minutes - \$20/month >1000 interstate weekend minutes - \$20/month >1000 interstate anytime minutes - \$40/month >1000 night instate and interstate - \$30/month		*Higher calling card rates apply with no monthly fee. **Cost depends on average length of calls.		Variety of other plans offered including "5¢ Evenings and Weekends" offering 5¢ off-peak, 10¢ peak for interstate calls and 12¢/min. for all instate calls.	
	Usage over \$20/month gets 6- second billing. Totals do not reflect savings from 6-second billing.				*For \$8.95/month, Sprint offers 5¢/min. interstate at all times with 10¢/min. for instate calls or 5¢/min. nights & weekends instate and interstate.		Other more conventional rate plans also available.		Promotion offers 60 free minutes for 6 months and pint of Ben & Jerry's per month for 12 months. 1% of phone charges donated to charities.	

HOW DO I MAKE A LONG DISTANCE CALL? – LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

Long gone are the days when all you had to know to make a call was the number to dial. Now, the way you dial can have a tremendous impact on the price you pay and the methods are constantly growing. Consider the following options:

1. Simply dial 7 or 11 digits – You'll pay rates based upon the calling plan that you authorized for your phone number. Usually, a call to another Maine number will be priced differently from a call to an out-of-state number. Pages 4 and 5 of this guide compare the rates for those subscribed services.

Advantage – Convenient dialing and low rates if you've shopped for the best service for your calling pattern.

Disadvantage – None.

2. Dial a 7-digit 10-10 number and then dial 7 or 11 digits – Also known as "dial around" service, this allows you to avoid (or replace) your subscribed service and have your call carried by the company that owns the 10-10 number you choose. Rates vary tremendously. See the chart on page 7.

Advantage – May result in a lower rate. May avoid monthly surcharges for universal service.

Disadvantage – Less convenient dialing; rates more likely to change without notice, rates may vary by length of call, place of call, and time of day.

3. Calling Card from Telephone Company – Almost all phone companies offer calling cards that allow you to place a call by dialing their 1-800 access number and then your PIN before dialing a telephone number. The bill for these calls will usually appear on your regular phone bill.

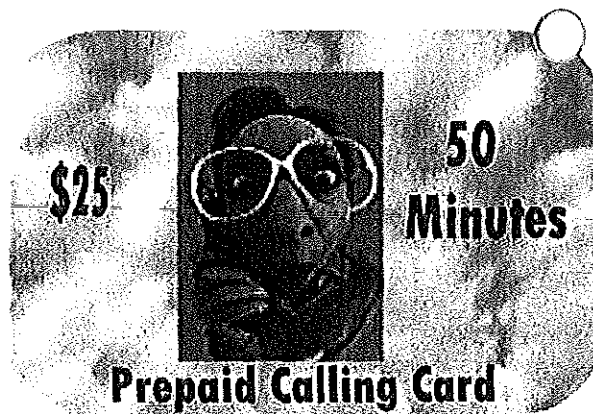
Advantage – Useful for making calls while away from home.

Disadvantage – Rates charged by many phone companies are very high – see the chart on pages 4 and 5 for best rates on calling cards. Payphone surcharge applies (usually about 30¢).

4. Prepaid Calling Cards – Cards you can purchase from stores, telephone companies and even from companies in unrelated businesses. Card comes with a certain number of minutes for a set price. Card provides you with a 1-800 access number and an account number to dial before dialing your telephone number.

Advantage – Useful for making calls away from home – sometimes at lower rates than conventional calling cards; no monthly bills.

Disadvantage – Payment is made in advance; rates can be very high but some good deals can be found (under 10¢/minute); if company issuing card goes out of business or if you lose your card/account number, you lose its remaining value; you will be disconnected from your conversation when minutes run out; less convenient dialing for home use; some cards use "message units" rather than minutes – this can be a way of applying hidden fees that effectively raise the rate.



5. Prepaid Internet Accounts (paid by credit card) – Some Internet-based firms now offer a prepaid calling account when you sign up on-line using your credit card to purchase any dollar amount of long-distance minutes. You will then be given an access number and PIN. An example is www.bigzoo.com which charges 3.9 cents per minute.

Advantage – Some of the lowest rates available; you decide how many minutes to buy in advance; no universal service surcharges; access to account information using the Internet.

Disadvantage – Must provide credit card number over the Internet, new firms may or may not be reliable - customer service complaints have been high according to a published report; less convenient dialing for home use.

6. Internet Phone Calls (voice over IP) – Web sites that allow you to dial any telephone number and ring your called party – using your computer's sound card, speakers, and microphone to talk and listen.

Advantage – They're either FREE or very cheap. For example, see www.dialpad.com, www.phonefree.com, www.pagoo.com, www.deltathree.com and www.net2phone.com. Some analysts believe that, in the future, most telephone calls will be made via the Internet.

Disadvantage – Quality can be poor, depending on network congestion and your software and hardware; you'll need modern computer hardware; technology is still in need of refinement. Won't work during an electrical outage.

7. Dial 0 or 0 plus 10-digit number –

Advantage – Provides operator assistance.

Disadvantage – May lead to sky-high charges. You may not know in advance which company is providing service, but you'll certainly notice when you get their bill.

SAMPLE DIAL-AROUND 10-10-XXX SERVICE RATES

Number	10-10-345	10-10-432	10-10-297	10-10-457	10-10-399	10-10-220	10-10-321	10-10-811
Company	AT&T Lucky Dog	Qwest	Excel	Excel	Excel	MCI/ WorldCom	MCI/ WorldCom	VarTec (FiveLine)
Domestic								
Interstate Rate	10¢/min. plus 10¢/call	25¢/min. peak 7¢/min. off- peak	10¢/min.	10¢/min. peak 4¢/min. off- peak 5 min. minimum	90¢ for first 10 min. then 5¢/min.	99¢ for first 20 min. then 7¢/min.	16¢/min. for calls under 10 min. 8¢/min. for calls over 10 min.	50¢ for first 10 min. then 5¢/min.
Instate Rate	Same as interstate	30¢/min. peak 25¢/min. off- peak	20¢/min.	15¢/min. 75¢ minimum	\$2.00 for first 10 min. then 18¢/min.	Same as interstate	up to 54¢/min. for daytime calls under 10 min.	Same as interstate
International								
Canada	7¢/min.	9¢/min.	10¢/min.	9¢/min. 45¢ minimum	99¢ for 10 min. then 7¢/min.	99¢ for 20 min. then 7¢/min.	20¢/min. for calls under 10 min. 10¢/min. for calls over 10 min.	5¢/min. 50¢ minimum
UK	10¢/min.	10¢/min.	11¢/min.	10¢/min. 50¢ minimum	\$1.10 for 10 min. then 9¢/min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	64¢/min. for calls under 10 min. 32¢/min. for calls over 10 min.	10¢/min.
France	15¢/min.	\$1.49/min.	23¢/min.	21¢/min. \$1.05 minimum	\$2.30 for 10 min. then 21¢/min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	64¢/min. for calls under 10 min. 32¢/min. for calls over 10 min.	12¢/min.
Germany	10¢/min.	\$1.39/min.	27¢/min.	20¢/min. \$1.00 minimum	\$2.30 for 10 min. then 21¢/min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	64¢/min. for calls under 10 min. 32¢/min. for calls over 10 min.	12¢/min.
Fees & Customer Service #'s								
Fees*	10¢/call	6.85% USF	86¢/mo. USF	86¢/mo. USF	none	8.3% USF	8.3% USF	4.9% USF
Customer Service	1-800 317-2657	1-877 825-5432	1-800 787-7887	1-800 787-3333	1-888 399-0002	1-800 728-6161	1-800 728-6161	1-800 363-2789

*USF = Universal Service Fund charge.

All rates are current as of date of publication and are subject to change without notice.

**Public Advocate Office
112 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0112**

PRESORT
FIRST-CLASS
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 8
AUGUSTA, ME

LOCAL COMPETITION – IS IT COMING TO MAINE?

Local competition is beginning to make inroads in Maine but business and urban customers will generally be the first to have choices in the local phone market. Companies that seek to provide local service in competition with your established local company (Bell Atlantic for 85% of Maine's customers) are called CLECs (Competitive Local Exchange Carriers). Some CLECs will provide service through cable TV wires, some through renting portions of the local company's facilities, and some through new wireless technologies. Time Warner is currently offering cable-based telephone service to a limited number of customers in Portland and Presque Isle, and One Star is offering discounted local service to some residential customers in Maine by renting Bell Atlantic's facilities.

PRESUBSCRIBED CALLING PLANS ON THE INTERNET

Internet users can find additional calling plans that offer good rates and 1+ dialing. Two examples are www.onlinechoice.com and www.essential.com. However, not all such services offer instate calling. In addition, you can often find lower rates from the big carriers if you sign up on their web sites. However, beware that the best rates often require online billing or credit card billing. Be careful to understand the difference between these services and prepaid services like www.bigzoo.com, which require payment in advance and dialing by means of an access number and PIN.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE OFFICE

Stephen G. Ward, the Public Advocate, and his staff of seven represent Maine's telephone, electric, gas, and water customers before the Maine Public Utilities Commission, the courts, and federal agencies. Our mission is to work for reasonably priced, safe, and reliable utility services for Maine people.