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# Ratewatcher Phone Guide Vol. 9 Jan. 2002

Maine Public Advocate Office

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# RATEWATCHER PHONE GUIDE

VOLUME 9

JANUARY 2002

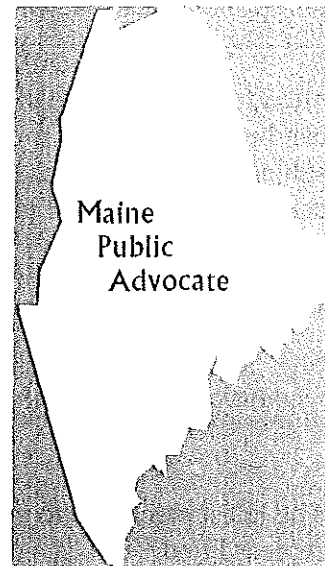
RATEWATCHER GUIDE

## NEW LOCAL CALLING AREA OPTIONS SHOULD BE COMING SOON!

The PUC will soon propose a new rule that will give most of Maine's telephone customers certain options for increasing their toll-free local calling areas. We expect the new rule to provide some or all of the following options:

1. Keep the existing calling area and the same local service rate.
2. Add all bordering telephone exchanges for a moderate increase in the monthly rate.
3. Add all exchanges in your school administrative district for a certain increase in your local rate.
4. Add a specific nearby exchange to your calling area for a certain increase in your local rate.

The new rule is subject to change after comments are filed by telephone companies, the Public Advocate, and other interested parties. The particular rate for each option will also need to be worked out in proceedings before the PUC, before the rule goes into effect. If you would like to receive copies of the proposed rule when it is published, you may call the PUC at 287-3831 and ask that you be named as an interested party in docket # 2001-865. If you would like to file comments on this rule, you may do so by sending your comments to the PUC's Administrative Director and referencing that same docket number.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

The cheapest way to make a regular phone call in Maine is the AT&T/Sam's Club prepaid calling card. Currently, you can buy 600 minutes for \$20.82 or 1000 minutes for \$34.70 (about 3.5¢ per minute). Since you can buy additional minutes (minimum of 200) by telephone, you don't need to return to the store when the minutes run out. If you don't want to go to Sam's Club, [www.bigzoo.com](http://www.bigzoo.com) sells minutes for 3.9 cents over the Internet. These services charge the same rate for instate and interstate calls and can be used anywhere in the U.S. In addition, unlike presubscribed service, prepaid services work as travel cards while away from home. Prepaid services do have certain disadvantages – you don't get a record of your calls, it's difficult to detect errors, if any, in your minute balance, and dialing is more cumbersome. However, if you have a programmable speed dial feature on your phone, you can hit one button to access the service and another to transmit your account number before dialing your call.

If you want the convenience of a regular 1+ dialing calling plan, customers in Verizon territory who make both instate and interstate calls should consider GTC, Equal Net, 1Com and Norcom. Customers served by independent telephone companies should check with their local company to see which carriers are available. OneStar is generally available in all areas. Heavy instate callers should consider MCI's Regional Calling Plan and heavy interstate callers should consider ECG. International callers who make many calls to a particular country should look at pay-per-call services from GFI, PNG, and Vartec (see page 7), and compare those rates to the ones offered by your presubscribed carrier. 1Com, ECG and others offer excellent international rates at no extra charge with their presubscribed service (see pages 4-5).

## WANT TO SAVE ON YOUR PHONE BILL? SHOP AND DROP

**Shop** for services of different companies and choose the one that would result in the lowest total bill given your calling patterns. If you have Internet access, try our automatic calling plan selector -- go to <http://www.state.me.us/meopa> and click on "Calling Selector."

**Drop** unnecessary optional services such as inside wire maintenance, caller ID, call waiting, bill consolidation charges and other optional services you may not need. You may also consider dropping your presubscribed long distance service (especially those with monthly fees) if you make few long distance calls. If you drop regular 1+ dialing long-distance service, you'll need to make long-distance calls using one of several alternative ways of calling (see page 2).

## ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF CALLING

1. **Prepaid calling cards** are now as low as 3.5¢ per minute (for example, AT&T's card sold at Sam's Club). Prepaid calling cards are easier to use if you can program your phone's memory feature to speed dial the access number and then your PIN number. Prepaid minutes can also be purchased online from [www.bigzoo.com](http://www.bigzoo.com) or [www.net2phone.com](http://www.net2phone.com) at 3.9¢ per minute.
2. **10-10 Dial Around** (See page 7) These services can be used whether or not you have a presubscribed long-distance carrier.
3. **Traditional calling cards** -- These are worth considering only if you don't mind paying rates that often far exceed those of the best prepaid cards. Regular calling cards from AT&T, MCI, Sprint, and Verizon can be up to 40 times more expensive than the best prepaid cards. Unlike prepaid cards, you will also be subject to various surcharges and taxes when using a regular calling card. However, traditional calling cards carry the advantage of providing a record of each call and billing only after calls are made.
4. **Internet Calling** - Free from services such as [www.dialpad.com](http://www.dialpad.com), [www.net2phone.com](http://www.net2phone.com), [www.speakfreely.org](http://www.speakfreely.org) and others. However service quality varies from good to poor.
5. **Wireless Calling** - (See page 9) May be an economic alternative to regular phone service for customers who make many off-peak calls.

## ANNOYING SURCHARGE DEPARTMENT

The latest surcharge to appear on your local phone bill is related to the Maine School and Library Education Access Fund. This is a new program authorized by the Maine Legislature to subsidize information service technology for Maine's schools and libraries. It requires contributions from all telecommunications carriers in Maine of .5% of their instate revenues. The PUC, in turn, has allowed carriers to place a surcharge on retail bills to recover those contributions. The surcharge is calculated by multiplying .5% (.005) times the total charged for all instate services. Interstate services are not subject to this surcharge.

**Verizon Customers Pay Twice** --Unfortunately, Verizon's ratepayers in Maine continue to pay \$4 million per year for the former school and library program, which no longer exists! The Public Utilities Commission has failed to take this contribution out of rates even though Verizon no longer incurs any costs under the old program. In our view, Verizon's customers are paying twice and Verizon is receiving a windfall. This issue will be brought to the Maine Supreme Court as part of the Public Advocate's appeal (see page 8).

## BAD CALL DEPARTMENT

### DO YOU ACCEPT COLLECT CALLS? PREPARE TO PAY THE PRICE!

Think twice before accepting collect calls. Like other operator assisted calls, you may be shocked by the bill you'll get for collect calls. Recently, an AT&T customer reported that he was charged \$12.81 for an 8 minute call. That call would have cost 28¢ if it had been made using a good prepaid calling card. Therefore, if you regularly expect calls from someone who can't afford to pay for a call, consider providing that person with a prepaid calling card. If you've asked your local phone company to block all toll calls on your line, be sure to clarify whether collect calls will also be blocked.

Other potential bad calls include any call beginning with 0, any call beginning with 900, 976 or 940 (unless you know what you're getting and know the price) and any call using a calling card that charges high per call surcharges or rates of more than 10 cents per minute (all old regular calling cards should be destroyed). You can ask your local phone company to block (without charge) 900, 976 and 940 calls from your phone. You may also block all toll calls from your home phone. Toll-free area codes include 800, 888, 877, and 866.

### NOT SURE WHICH CARRIER YOU'RE CONNECTED TO?

Call 1-(700) 555-4141 for a recording identifying your interstate toll carrier. Call 700-4141 for a recording identifying your instate toll carrier. If your long-distance company is a reseller, the name you hear may not be that of the company that bills you.

## FREEBIE DEPARTMENT

**Onebox.com** offers free email, voicemail, and fax service. Just sign on and you'll immediately get a free email address and a free telephone number that you can use to receive faxes and voice messages. It also allows you to send and receive voice messages without incurring any toll charges. Although Onebox does not currently offer telephone numbers in Maine's 207 area code, you may choose a number that would be a local call for your friends, family, or business associates elsewhere in the country. It costs nothing to access your voice mail, faxes, and email because you can do that via the Internet.

### SOME INDEPENDENT LOCAL PHONE COMPANY CUSTOMERS HAVE ADDITIONAL LONG-DISTANCE OPTIONS

Some Maine local telephone companies offer toll services exclusively to their local customers. If you are served by one of the following local phone companies, compare their toll rates to the best of the national plans listed on page 4 and 5.

**Oxford**  
**Oxford West**  
**Oxford Networks**  
**(888) 297-9272**

Offer their residential and business customers toll rates of 8¢ per minute (with 6-second billing) applicable to instate and interstate calls, with no monthly fees, minimums, or toll surcharges. Excellent international rates.

**TDS Companies**  
**(888) 837-1347**

Offer their residential customers instate toll rates of 10¢ per minute with a \$1.95 monthly fee and interstate toll rates of 5¢ per minute with an \$8.95 monthly fee. Business instate toll rates are 11.9¢ per minute with a \$1.95 monthly fee and business interstate rates are 6.9¢ per minute under a multi-year contract with no monthly fee. A 5.71% USF surcharge is added.

**Saco River**  
**(207) 929-9911**

Offers "Simply One" service to residential customers at an instate rate of 8¢ per minute, an interstate rate of 7¢ per minute, and a monthly fee of \$4.95. A 4.9% USF surcharge is added for interstate and international usage.

**Northland**  
**800-455-5642**

Offers its residential customers instate toll rates of 14¢ per minute and interstate rates of 15¢ per minute. Business customers get instate rates of 13¢ per minute and interstate rates of 15¢ per minute. These plans have no monthly fees and 6-second billing applies.

**Pine Tree Networks**  
**(207) 657-9911**

Offers instate toll service at the same rates as Verizon's Pine Tree and Sensible Minute plans (see Verizon column on page 5).

#### 711 SERVICE FOR DEAF, HARD-OF- HEARING OR SPEECH IMPAIRED CALLERS

If you use a text telephone (TTY) or if you call a hearing-impaired (or speech-disabled) person who uses one, you can now reach AT&T's relay center simply by dialing 711. The cost of the call will be the same as a regular direct-dialed call from your phone, minus a 70% discount.

**NOTE** - We have discontinued reporting calling card rates for each carrier because we now recommend that customers use prepaid calling cards for travel. Prepaid calling card rates are now among the lowest rates available (as low as 3.5¢ per minute) while traditional calling cards often result in some of the highest rates. Where to get them? Think "BIG" - big box stores like Sam's or Cosco; on the Internet, try **Bigzoo.com**

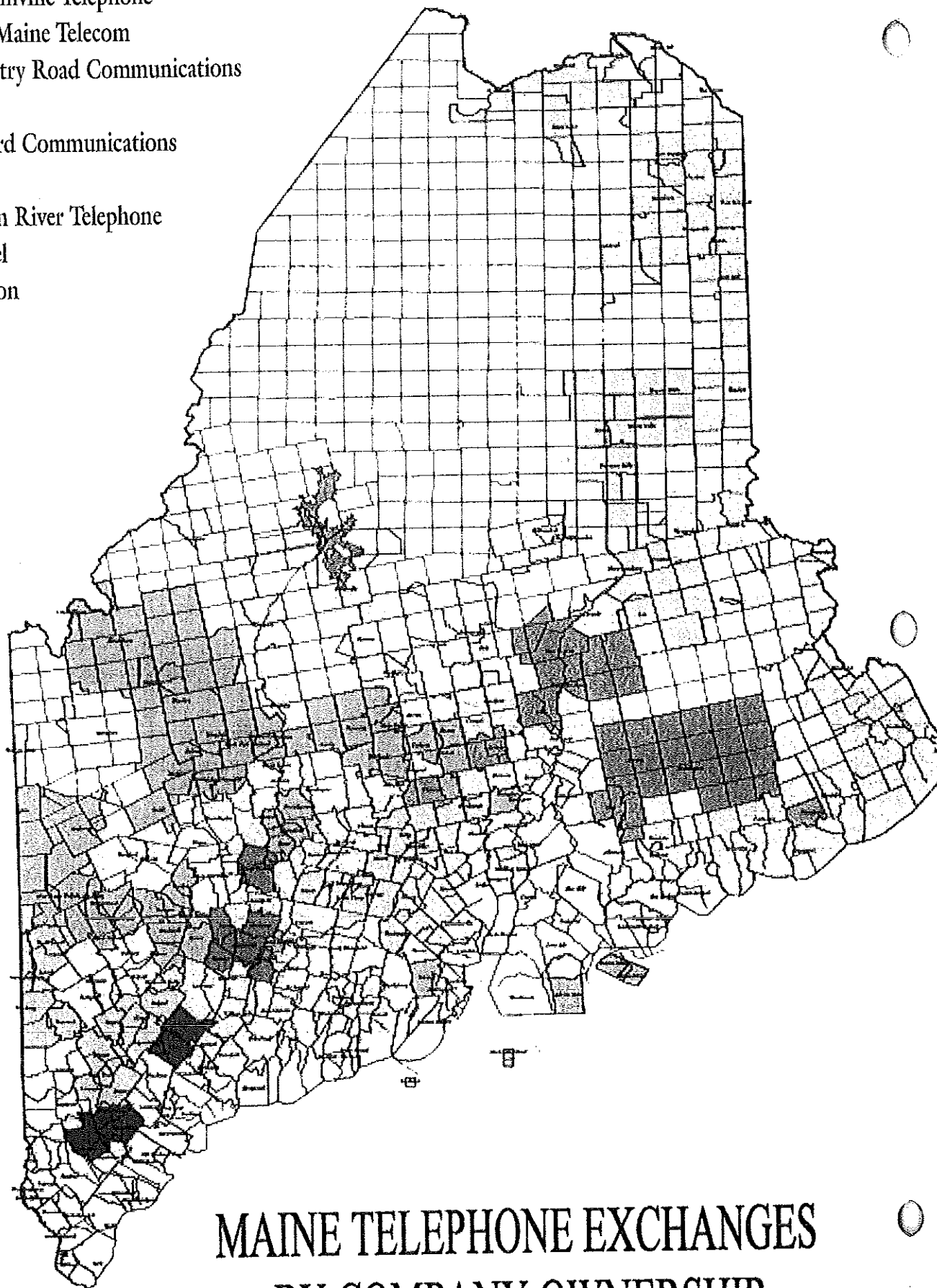
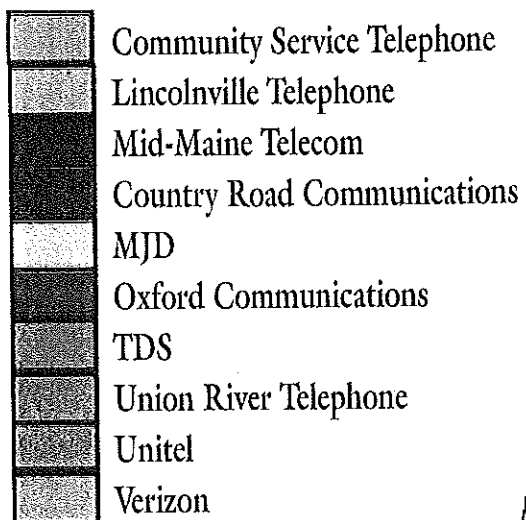
# SAMPLING OF RESIDENTIAL & BUSINESS LONG-DISTANCE TELEPHONE RATES AS OF JANUARY 2002

COMPANY	1Com		AT&T		Equal Net		Excel		GTC		IDT		MCI WorldCom	
FEATURED PLAN	5.9¢ Plan		One Rate 7¢ Plan		4.9¢ Plan		Simply More		5¢ Plan II		5 Cents Plan		7¢ AnyTime Plan	
(RESIDENTIAL)	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate
RESIDENTIAL per minute rate (including %-based surcharges)	7.70¢	6.31¢	8¢	7.81¢	6.90¢	5.34¢	8¢	7¢	8¢	5.42¢	9¢	5.50¢	10¢	7.69¢
Minimum	None		None		\$2.49		None		None		None		None	
Monthly Fee	None		\$4.40*		None		\$5.94		None*		\$4.34		\$5.44	
BUSINESS per minute rates (including %-based surcharges)	7.70¢	6.31¢	15¢	7.25¢**	6.90¢	5.34¢	13¢	7.50¢	8¢	5.42¢	9¢	5.50¢	13¢*	7.58¢
Minimum	None		\$9.95		\$2.49*		None		None		None		\$10.00	
Monthly Fee	None		None		None		\$12.80		\$4.95		\$8.74		None	
RESIDENTIAL SAMPLE MONTHLY COSTS: Includes 50% instate/50% interstate minutes and monthly fees. Totals do not include directory assistance, calling card calls or international calls.														
LOW @ 10 mins. per month	70¢		\$5.19		\$2.49		\$6.69		.67¢		\$5.07		\$6.33	
MEDIUM @ 100 mins. per month	\$7.00		\$12.31		\$6.12		\$13.44		\$6.71		\$11.59		\$14.29	
HIGH @ 500 mins. per month	\$35.02		\$43.92		\$30.59		\$43.44		\$33.54		\$40.59		\$49.67	
HIGHEST @ 1,000 mins. per month	\$70.04		\$83.43		\$61.18		\$80.94		\$67.08		\$76.84		\$93.91	
INTERNATIONAL RATES														
Canada	7.48¢		7.81¢		8.17¢		7¢		9.75¢		5.50¢		7.69¢	
UK	7.48¢		10.04¢		7.73¢		10¢		10.83¢		7.70¢		10.99¢	
France	7.48¢		16.73¢		9.23¢		17¢		16.25¢		7.70¢		18.68¢	
Germany	7.48¢		16.73¢		8.34¢		17¢		16.25¢		7.70¢		18.68¢	
Japan	9.62¢		15.61¢		12.96¢		13¢		17.33¢		9.90¢		28.57¢	
UNIVERSAL SERVICE CHARGE (included in rates as shown)	6.92%		11.5%		8.9%		\$1.44		8.3%		9.99%		9.9%	
To Subscribe, Call:	1(888)505-3311		1(800)222-0300		1(877)484-7283		1(800)875-9235		1(800)486-4030		1(888)802-0082		1(800)444-3333	
ADDITIONAL DETAILS/ALTERNATIVE PLANS	Interstate rate decreases to 4.9¢ if you sign up for one year, and 4.5¢ if you sign up for two years.		*Monthly fees drop by \$1 with on-line billing. No fee basic plan is 17.5¢/minute for instate and interstate. 5¢ interstate weekend rate available for additional \$1 per month. **With online billing. Rate is 8.4¢ with regular billing.		Listed number is an agent, GTI. Higher rates are quoted directly from Equal Net. *Alternative Plan - no monthly minimum with 1¢ higher interstate rate.		"Simply More" subscribers can receive a personal 800/8XX number with no monthly service fee. The inbound rates is 15¢ per minute. Off-peak interstate callers should consider Three Penny Plan - 3¢/minute evenings - 10¢/day - \$5.95 per month. Business USF charge = 7.13%		*\$1.95 monthly fee is added unless customer agrees to credit card billing and online itemized calls. GTC no longer provides itemized calls by mail without a \$1.95 monthly fee. Itemized calls are available via the Internet. Directory Assistance is 85¢ - lower than 411.		6-second billing.		"Regional Calling Plan" offers 5¢/minute instate, 13.44¢/minute interstate with \$3/month fee. MCI's other plans include 12¢ Anytime Plan with no monthly fee. *Alternative "Business Sense" plan - 9¢ instate rate with \$3 monthly fee.	
DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE RATES	411 (Verizon) Interstate Directory Assistance = 95¢													
	411 (Verizon) Instate Directory Assistance = 3¢ free/40¢ for each additional per month.													
	XXX 555-1212 - Directory Assistance rates depend on long distance carrier - all are higher than 411 except as noted.													
	Note - Multi-line business customers are also subject to instate and interstate PICC charges.													
	Note - AT&T has recently announced that its Universal Service Fund surcharge has increased to 11.5% as of January 1, 2002. It is probable that other carriers will also raise that surcharge.													
	Switching fee (\$5) will generally be reimbursed upon request.													

**NOTE:** Best plans available only in Verizon territory. Some charge higher rates in independent areas. Per minute rates and monthly fees include the surcharge applied by each company for its universal service surcharge.

## SAMPLING OF RESIDENTIAL & BUSINESS LONG-DISTANCE TELEPHONE RATES AS OF JANUARY 2002

COMPANY	Norcom		OneStar		PowerNetGlobal		VarTec		Verizon	ECG
FEATURED PLAN (RESIDENTIAL)	5.9¢ Plan		Meridian		4.5¢ Plan		Vartec Voice		Pine Tree State Service	ECG 4.9¢
	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate	Instate	Interstate
RESIDENTIAL per minute rate (including %-based surcharges)	5.90¢	6.30¢	8.81¢	7.58¢	11.98¢	4.95¢	7¢	7.48¢	9¢/8¢	5.29¢
Minimum	None		\$3.00		None		None		\$5.40*	None
Monthly Fee	None		\$1.05*		\$2.75*		75¢		None	None
BUSINESS per minute rates (including %-based surcharges)	5.90¢	6.30¢	8.81¢	6.48¢	11.98¢	4.95¢	7¢	7.48¢	13¢ (Bus. Link)**	5.29¢
Minimum	None		\$3.00		None		None		None	
Monthly Fee	None*		\$3.30		\$2.75*		75¢		None	
RESIDENTIAL SAMPLE MONTHLY COSTS:	Includes 50% instate/50% interstate minutes and monthly fees. Totals do not include directory assistance, calling card calls or international calls.									
LOW @ 10 mins. per month	61¢		\$5.04		\$3.59		\$1.47		\$5.66	
MEDIUM @ 100 mins. per month	\$6.10		\$9.24		\$11.21		\$7.99		\$8.04	
HIGH @ 500 mins. per month	\$30.50		\$42.03		\$42.31		\$36.96		\$33.83**	
HIGHEST @ 1,000 mins. per month	\$61.01		\$81.97		\$84.62		\$73.17		\$67.05**	
INTERNATIONAL RATES										
Canada	12.81¢		9.78¢		8.79¢		7.48¢		7.55¢***	
UK	7.48¢		6.26¢		8.79¢		7.48¢		6.37¢***	
France	16¢		7.36¢		10.99¢		12.83¢		6.37¢***	
Germany	9.61¢		7.14¢		9.89¢		12.83¢		7.55¢***	
Japan	13.77¢		11.79¢		15.39¢		12.83¢		11.01¢***	
UNIVERSAL SERVICE CHARGE (included in rates as shown)	6.8%		9.9%		9.9%**		6.9187%		7.8941%	
To Subscribe, Call:	**		1(800)482-0000		1(800)656-3761		1(800)583-8811		(800)585-4466	(800)254-4060
ADDITIONAL DETAILS/ALTERNATIVE PLANS										
DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE RATES										
411 (Verizon) interstate Directory Assistance = 95¢	*Monthly bill must meet or exceed \$20 or a \$3.95 service charge will apply (waived if bill is e-mailed). **Norcom markets through local agents in Maine, who offer personal service and information about other plans. For example, Coastal Connections (888)-262-7864, GTI (877)-484-7283 and HiTech Computer Telephone (888)-594-2500. 6-second billing and 30-second minimum per call. Norcom is available in independent areas at higher rates.		*Monthly fee is waived if usage exceeds \$50, or upon one year commitment. ***"Acclaim" business plan monthly fee waived if usage exceeds \$100 or upon one year commitment.		*Alternative Plan - no monthly fee with "5.4¢/plan" with effective rate of 5.93¢ interstate and 10.9¢ instate. Fee waived if usage exceeds \$15. **Company reports that USF surcharge applies to instate and interstate charges. Alternative Plan - 6-second billing applies under "4.9¢ Plan." Inbound 800 service available at same rates as a stand-alone service.		Vartec also offers Fiveline Service - 5¢ for all calls within the U.S. with a 50¢ per call minimum. That plan offers excellent rates for calls over 10 minutes but poor rates for very short calls. Fiveline rates are also available by dialing 10-10-811 (see page 7).		ECG and Verizon are not affiliated. This combination is provided for comparison purposes. ECG may be chosen for interstate-only service and Verizon currently provides instate service only. ECG - applies 6-second billing and offers same rates for 800 inbound service. ***International rates are those of ECG. Verizon - "Low volume customers should consider Verizon's Sensible Minute Plan (for instate) at 10¢ per minute with no monthly minimum or fee. **Minus 5% to 30% volume discount. Pine Tree rate drops to 8¢ after the first hour. For this combination each provider must be contacted separately.	
411 (Verizon) Instate Directory Assistance = 3 free/40¢ for each additional per month.										
XXX 555-1212 - Directory Assistance rates depend on long distance carrier - all are higher than 411 except as noted.										
Note - Multi-line business customers are also subject to instate and interstate PICC charges. Note - AT&T has recently announced that its Universal Service Fund surcharge has increased to 11.5% as of January 1, 2002. It is probable that other carriers will also raise that surcharge. Switching fees (\$5) will generally be reimbursed upon request.										



## MAINE TELEPHONE EXCHANGES BY COMPANY OWNERSHIP



## DIAL-AROUND OPTIONS

Dialing a 10-10-XXX number allows you to bypass your regular carrier, if any, and access a service on a pay-per-call basis. Customers who call a number within their municipality but beyond their local calling area may dial 10-10-698 (Verizon) to use free municipal calling service. But use of that dial-around number for any other calls will result in high rates.

Use dial-around services with caution—while there are a few bargains to be had by dialing 10-10-XXX, many such calls can result in very high rates. USF charges apply to interstate and international rates.

Number	10-10-345	10-10-432	*Power Dial	10-10-457	10-10-399	*GFI-800	10-10-220	10-10-321	10-10-811
Company	AT&T Lucky Dog	Qwest	PNG	Excel	Excel	World Access	MCI/ WorldCom	MCI/ WorldCom	VarTec FiveLine
<b>DOMESTIC</b>									
<b>Interstate Rate</b>	10¢/min. plus 15¢/call	16¢/min. peak 16¢/min. off- peak - 3 min. minimum	6.9¢/min.	10¢/min. peak 4¢/min. off- peak 5 min. minimum	90¢ for first 10 min. then 5¢/min.	6.9¢/min.	99¢ for first 20 min. then 7¢/min.	18¢/min. under 10 min. 9¢/min. over 10 min.	50¢ for first 10 min. then 5¢/min.
<b>Instate Rate</b>	Same as interstate	30¢/min. peak 25¢/min. off- peak - 3 min. minimum	7.9¢/min. **	16¢/min. 80¢ minimum	\$2.00 for first 10 min. then 18¢/min.	6.9¢/min.	Same as interstate	up to 54¢/min. for daytime calls under 10 min.	Same as interstate
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>									
<b>Canada</b>	8¢/min.	39¢/min. peak 33¢/ min. off- peak - 3 min. minimum	8¢ to 11¢ min.	9¢/min. 45¢ minimum	99¢ for 10 min. then 7¢/min.	9.66¢/ min.	99¢ for 20 min. then 7¢/min.	20¢/min. under 10 min. 10¢/min. over 10 min.	5¢/min. 50¢ minimum
<b>UK</b>	22¢/min.	\$1.21/min. 3 min. minimum	8¢/min.	10¢/min. 50¢ minimum	\$1.10 for 10 min. then 9¢/min.	8.77¢/ min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	67¢/min. under 10 min. 34¢/min. over 10 min.	10¢/min.
<b>France</b>	19¢/min.	\$1.49/min. 3 min. minimum	8¢/min.	21¢/min. \$1.05 minimum	\$2.30 for 10 min. then 21¢/min.	11.15¢/ min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	67¢/min. under 10 min. 34¢/min. over 10 min.	12¢/min.
<b>Germany</b>	22¢/min.	\$1.39/min. 3 min. minimum	8¢/min.	20¢/min. \$1.00 minimum	\$2.30 for 10 min. then 21¢/min.	10.85¢/ min.	\$1.99 for 10 min. then 19¢/min.	67¢/min. under 10 min. 34¢/min. over 10 min.	12¢/min.
<b>Japan</b>	11¢/min.	\$1.62/min. 3 min. minimum	11¢ to 13¢ min.	25¢/min. \$1.25 minimum	\$2.70 10 min. then 25¢/min.	11.57¢/ min. to 26.24¢/ min.	\$1.19 10 min. then 9¢/min.	34¢/min. Under 10 min. then 34¢/min.	15¢/min.
<b>**UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND SURCHARGE (USF) &amp; CUSTOMER SERVICE #'s</b>									
<b>USF**</b>	15¢/call	9.9%	9.9%	\$1.12/mo.	\$1.12/mo.	0% USF	9.9% USF	9.9% USF	75¢/month
<b>Customer Service</b>	1-800 317-2657	1-877 825-5432	1-800 382-9622	1-800 787-3333	1-888 399-0002	1-800- 350- 1336*	1-800 728-6161	1-800 728-6161	1-800 363-2789

\*Must sign up prior to use. \*\*PNG applies USF to instate service as well.



## PUBLIC ADVOCATE TAKES APPEAL TO MAINE SUPREME COURT AGAINST THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION AND VERIZON



On November 9, 2001, the Public Advocate filed an appeal to the Maine Supreme Court of the Public Utilities Commission's recent Order granting unjustified rate increases and excessive pricing flexibility to Verizon-Maine. The Maine Legislature has authorized the PUC to adopt new forms of regulation for Verizon only if the PUC also adopts specific safeguards designed to protect local service ratepayers. The Public Advocate believes that the PUC failed to obey those statutes and that the decision awards Verizon more than \$122 million in excess revenues over the next five years. The Public Advocate cited seven separate legal errors in the Commission's Order as the basis for our request that the Supreme Court reverse the Commission's decision. Most notably, the PUC awarded rate increases to Verizon without accepting any evidence concerning Verizon's overall costs or profits. If the Supreme Court agrees, the PUC could be required to reverse recent local rate increases and consider whether new rate decreases are required by law. A decision is expected in the first half of 2002.

### VERIZON FILES APPLICATION SEEKING APPROVAL TO PROVIDE INTERSTATE LONG-DISTANCE PHONE SERVICE

The federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 allows big, local phone companies like Verizon to enter the long-distance market only after they prove that their local markets are open to competition. Since Verizon owns the vast majority of the facilities necessary for competitors to provide service in Maine, competition is only possible when Verizon fully cooperates in making its facilities available promptly and at appropriate prices. Therefore, the 1996 law requires Verizon to make its facilities available to competitors at certain prices set by the PUC.

Currently, residential customers in Maine have virtually no choice in local service, even though it has been more than five years since the passage of this law. The Public Utilities Commission has recently opened a proceeding in order to determine whether to recommend that the FCC approve Verizon's application to enter the interstate market. The Public Advocate, with the help of expert witnesses, has criticized Verizon's compliance with the standards that were created to allow local telephone competition to develop. While some customers may enjoy the benefits of one-stop shopping that will be available when Verizon begins to offer state-to-state service, consumers will be harmed if Verizon's application is prematurely granted. Various competitive local telephone companies operating in Maine continue to complain that there are many obstacles in obtaining prompt and adequate wholesale services from Verizon. Without such prompt and fair provision of wholesale service, competition will be unlikely to develop here in Maine and Verizon will continue to be a monopoly provider of local service.

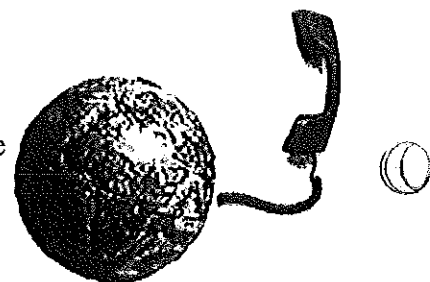
## SHOPPING TIPS

**LOOKING FOR AN INSTATE-ONLY PLAN?** Check out MCI's Regional Calling Plan. It allows instate service only with a rate of 5¢ per minute and a \$3 monthly fee. Verizon's Pine Tree (8¢ per minute, \$5.40 minimum) and Sensible Minute Plan (10¢ per minute) are also available as an instate only option.

**LOOKING FOR AN INTERSTATE-ONLY PLAN?** Check out ECG Long Distance 1(800) 254-4060 at 4.9¢ per minute. ECG is one of few companies that will allow selection of their interstate plan without also signing up for their instate plan. (See Verizon column on page 5 illustrating this combination).

**LOOKING FOR GOOD INTERNATIONAL RATES?** Avoid paying your regular long-distance provider a monthly fee just to get their best international rates. Usually, you can beat those rates with a separate international service while avoiding an extra monthly fee. For example, check out GFI, PNG and Vartec (see page 7) or the regular international rates of 1Com, ECG, and others on pages 4-5.

**HEAVY OFF-PEAK USAGE?** Consider a wireless plan offering "free" off-peak minutes if you have good wireless coverage in your area. Other options include cheap off-peak minutes from certain Excel and MCI plans.



## WIRELESS PLANS

If you have general questions about shopping for wireless service, you may consult the July issue of the Ratewatcher Guide or check our web site at [www.state.me.us/meopa](http://www.state.me.us/meopa). If you don't have Internet access, please call the Public Advocate (287-2445) and we'll mail you a free copy of our wireless shopping tips.

**SAMPLE OF WIRELESS PHONE PLANS** - - Except for prepaid plans, all plans require a one-year contract, with penalties for early termination. Featured plans are for medium volume usage - - higher volume customers and occasional/emergency-only users should ask about other options. Note that toll charges may apply to calls made to or from areas outside your "home" area unless you have a national toll-free plan. Roaming charges apply when the call originates outside of your home area—unless you have a national roaming free plan. Ask about promotions, which may temporarily offer better rates and more off-peak minutes than those below.

**BEWARE** - Wireless service rates, terms, and promotions change frequently and are not regulated by any agency of the state of Maine. Not all plans are available in all areas in Maine. Coverage and quality may vary.

Company	Monthly* Rate & Tel. #s	Monthly Minutes Included	Phone	Toll-Free/Roaming Free Area	Toll Rate	Roaming Rate
AT&T Regional Advantage	\$29.99 1 (800) 462-4463	120-250 peak, up to 1000 off-peak, 40¢ per additional minute	\$49 - \$200	ME, NH, MA, VT, CT, NY, RI, MD, DE and PA	0	60¢
AT&T National Plan	\$59.99 1 (800) 462-4463	450/peak, 500/offpeak (35¢ per additional min.)	\$179	National	0	0
Unicel Simply 1 Plan	\$29.95 1 (800) 244-9979	120 minutes (35¢ per additional min.)	\$5 - \$129	National	0	0
US Cellular - Home te 800	\$30 1 (800) 289-8722	300/peak, 500/offpeak (40¢ per additional min.)	\$20 - \$200	Maine	0	60¢
US Cellular- SpanAmerica - Keep in Touch	\$40 1 (800) 289-8722	200 minutes (35¢ per additional min.)	\$20 - \$200	National	0	0
Verizon - Northeast Single Rate	\$35 1 (800) 922-0204	300/peak, 3,200/offpeak (40¢ per additional min.)	\$20 - \$500	ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, MD, DE, DC, VA & NC	0	65¢
Verizon - National Single Rate	\$35 1 (800) 922-0204	150/peak, 3,350/offpeak (40¢ per additional min.)	\$99 - \$500	US—except parts of Alaska	0	0

### PREPAID WIRELESS PLANS

Company	Initial Setup Cost w/Phone	Cost Per Minute	Expiration of Prepaid Minutes	Minimum Recharge	Plan Details
AT&T - Free-to-Go	\$100 1 (800) 462-4463	local plan 12¢-35¢ national plan 22¢-65¢ (depending on # of min.) (roaming 85¢)	45 days	\$25 - phone number forfeited 45 days after minutes expire	Local = Coastal ME & NH
Verizon - Freeup Prepay Wireless	\$125 1 (800) 922-0204	25¢-35¢/peak, 10¢/offpeak (depending on # of min.) for all calls in U.S.	60 days	\$30 - Phone number forfeited 60 days after minutes expire	Available in Auburn, Bath, Brunswick, Portland
US Cellular—Talk Tracker	\$80 - \$130 (retail store)	35¢ ME north of Augusta & NH 60¢ elsewhere	60 days	\$10 - Phone number forfeited 60 days after refill	Check local coverage

Activation fees often apply but may be waived upon request.

**Beware of phone compatibility problems** - - after purchasing a phone meant to work with one company's wireless system, you may find that you cannot use that phone with another company's system.

## COMPETITIVE LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIERS

The following companies offer an alternative to Verizon's local service. OneStar and 1Com offer residential as well as business service. Except as noted, pricing is dependent upon a variety of factors.

Conversent (800-275-2088) ([conversent.com](http://conversent.com)) (only Portland area)

CTC Communications (800-287-9875) ([ctcnet.com](http://ctcnet.com))

Choice One (acquired Fairpoint) (888-832-5801) ([choiceone.com](http://choiceone.com))

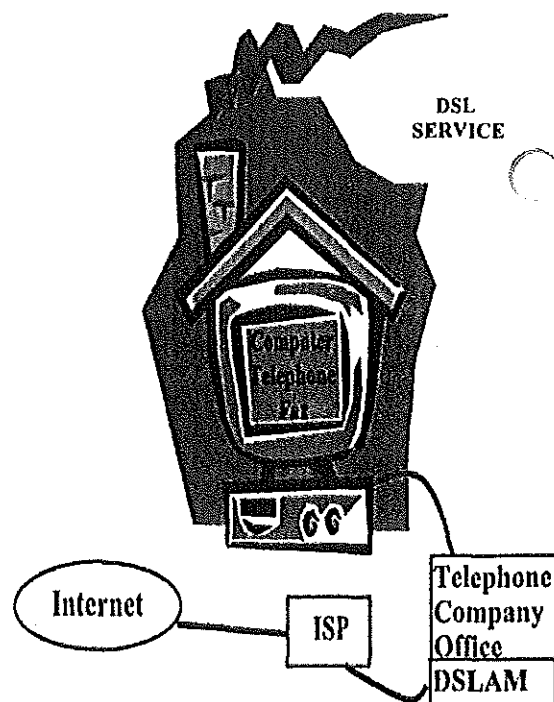
Lightship Telecom LLC (877-846-6700) ([lightship.net](http://lightship.net))

Mid-Maine Communications (800-835-5453) ([midmaine.com](http://midmaine.com))

Norcom - (Coastal Connections, as agent) (888-262-7864)

One Star Long Distance (800-482-0000) ([onestarld.com](http://onestarld.com))

1Com (888-505-3311) ([1cominc.com](http://1cominc.com)) (10% off Verizon's rate)



## INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS (ISPs)

Dozens of Internet services are available in Maine but many allow toll-free dial-up access only in a limited geographic area. However, the Maine PUC has approved the PRI HUB service, which allows statewide toll-free access to participating carriers using the prefix 500. The listing below indicates which ISPs are now ready to provide statewide toll-free dial-up access to their service using a 500 number. For additional local options, check our web site at [www.state.me.us/meopa](http://www.state.me.us/meopa) or call our office.

**CABLE** In addition to dial-up service, Internet services are provided by Cable TV companies who use the same coaxial cable that provides Cable TV service. The advantage of cable service is that it provides much faster service (higher bandwidth) than dial-up connections and that the service is always on without using a telephone line. Therefore, when considering the cost of this service, it may be appropriate for some customers to factor the price of a second phone line (up to \$26 including surcharges) as savings realized from using Internet service via coaxial cable.

**DSL** Another fast, high bandwidth Internet service is DSL service, which uses the same copper wires that provides your regular phone service. However, because DSL service uses a separate frequency, it does not interfere with the normal use of your phone line. DSL service may be provided by Internet service providers or by your local phone company. Like cable Internet service, DSL service can save the cost of a second phone line. However, DSL service is generally limited to customers who reside within 18,000 feet of a phone company central office. You may be able to find out if you are eligible for DSL service by logging onto a phone company's web site or by calling a local ISP. Both Cable and DSL Internet services start at about \$43 per month and may increase depending upon the chosen connection speed. Often, installation fees and equipment fees are also required.

**FREE** - [www.juno.com](http://www.juno.com) and [www.netzero.com](http://www.netzero.com) offer free dial-up Internet service and email addresses. If you don't mind advertising and if they list a local access number in your calling area, you have nothing to lose!

**Special note to customers served by independent telephone companies:** The 500 Hub service that allows statewide access to participating Internet Service providers is not yet working in independent (non-Verizon) territories. The delay is a result of a financial dispute between Verizon and the independent local companies. The Public Advocate and the Public Utilities Commission are encouraging a quick settlement in order to ensure that this service becomes available soon -- on a statewide basis.

**NOTE** - Many Maine ISPs with local access numbers for limited geographic areas are not included in this list. Check our website <http://www.state.me.us/meopa> for a more complete list of Maine ISPs.

# SAMPLING OF RESIDENTIAL INTERNET SERVICES IN MAINE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2002

COMPANY NAME	PHONE #	SERVICE FEATURES	RATES CHARGED Price Range Depends on Payment Method
<b>CABLE TV ISPs</b>			
Adelphia- Power Link www.adelphia.net	1-800-336-9988	Cable modem. Ask about special promotions. No equipment cost or activation fee.	\$42.95/month
Susquehanna Communications	1-800-439-2629	Cable modem. (Brunswick area)	\$29.95/month plus equipment purchase
Time Warner www.twmaine.com	1-800-762-3786	Cable modem.	\$47.20/month—So. Maine (Res.) \$47.30/month—No. Maine (Res.)
<b>STATEWIDE ISPs (Dial-up and DSL)</b>			
Prexar www.prexar.com	1-800-288-5072	5 email addresses, 5 MB personal web space. DSL	Unlimited dial-up—\$19.95 to \$22.95/month \$9.95/month for 10 hours DSL starting at \$44.95/month
hyperMedia www.hypernet.com	1-800-935-0040	DSL service throughout New England; web design and hosting	Unlimited dial-up—\$19.95 to \$22.95/month DSL starting at \$48.95/month
Panax.com www.panax.com	1-888-452-5100	Web site hosting and design. 3 mailboxes and 5 MB of web space.	Unlimited dial-up—\$14.95 to \$18.95/month
Log on America www.loa.com	1-888-985-3668	2 email addresses, free webmail access, web hosting, web design	Unlimited dial-up—\$16.95 to \$19.95/month
Route 1 www.wiscasset.net	1-888-682-4488	Business high speed dedicated access; net- work administration and setup – Discount of 20% for Educators & Students	Unlimited dial-up—\$22.91 to \$25.00/month
Great Works Internet www.gwi.net	1-800-201-1476	Web hosting, domain registration, co-location, DSL	Unlimited dial-up—\$19.95 to \$19.95/month \$8.95/month for 10 hours \$15.95/month for 40 hours DSL starting at \$49.95 + \$60 setup fee
Mid-Maine Communications www.midmaine.com	1-877-643-6246	Rate applies to both business and residential. Mid-Mail remote email access, 5MB of per- sonal web space & 2 email addresses 24/7 tech support.	Unlimited dial-up—\$14.95 to \$19.95/month + \$10 setup fee
Verizon www.verizon.com	1-888-427-1405	DSL	Unlimited DSL starting at \$49.95 (ask about available introductory discounts)
<b>NATIONAL ISPs (Dial-up)</b>			
AOL www.aol.com	Sign-up online	Dial-up Check website for local access numbers.	Unlimited dial-up—\$19.95 to \$23.90/month \$4.95 for 3 hours (+\$2.50 for additional hours) \$9.95 for 5 hours (+\$2.95 for additional hours)
AT&T Worldnet www.att.com	1-800-400-1447	Dial-up Check website for local access numbers.	Unlimited dial-up \$21.95/month \$16.95 for 150 hours/month (+.99 each additional hour)
Earthlink www.earthlink.com	1-800-395-8425	Dial-up, toll-free access available in Augusta, Bangor, Portland, and Rockland only.	Unlimited dialup—\$19.95 to \$21.95/month \$9.95 for 10 hours/month
Juno/Netzero www.netzero.com www.juno.com	Sign-up online	Dial-up, toll-free access available in Augusta, Bangor, Kittery, Lewiston, Portland, Presque Isle, and Rockland only.	Free 10 hours/month Premium service with less advertising \$9.95/ month

**LOCAL ISPs—See our web site or call for our listings. Also, see [www.thelist.com](http://www.thelist.com).**

## ATTENTION LOW-INCOME CUSTOMERS

The Lifeline monthly telephone bill credit for Verizon's low-income customers has been increased to \$13.78. As before, the Linkup program allows eligible low-income customers to get new telephone service for a \$10 installation fee. Most recipients of public assistance are automatically eligible for the Lifeline and Linkup programs. If you may be eligible, call your local phone company to enroll.

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

*Calling Plans* **INTERNET SERVICES** **Dial Around Services** **Wireless Services**  
**SURCHARGES** **BUSINESS PHONE RATES** **PREPAID SERVICES**  
**INTERNATIONAL SERVICES** **TELECOMMUNICATIONS NEWS** *SHOPPING TIPS*

### **SPEAKERS AVAILABLE**

The Public Advocate's staff is available to speak to groups on the following topics:

- Saving money on telephone service
- Restructuring of Maine's Electric Industry
- Changes in the regulation of Maine's telecommunications industry
- General information on state and federal regulation of public utilities

### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE'S OFFICE**

Stephen G. Ward, the Public Advocate, and his staff of eight 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.