

207 CMR 10.00: BILLING AND TERMINATION OF CABLE SERVICE

Section

- 10.01: Billing Practices Notice
- 10.02: Services, Rates and Charges Notice
- 10.03: Form of Bill
- 10.04: Advance Billing and Issuance of Bill
- 10.05: Billing Due Dates, Delinquency, Late Charges and Termination of Service
- 10.06: Charges for Disconnection or Downgrading of Service
- 10.07: Billing Disputes
- 10.08: Security Deposits

10.01: Billing Practices Notice

- (1) Upon request, a cable television operator shall give written notice of its billing practices to potential subscribers before a subscription agreement is reached. Otherwise, a cable television operator shall give written notice of its billing practices to potential subscribers at the time a subscription agreement is reached. Such notice shall include practices relating to the frequency and timing of bills, payment requirements necessary to avoid account delinquency, billing dispute resolution procedures, and late payment penalties.
- (2) A copy of the cable television operator's billing practices notice, work order, and sample subscriber bill shall be filed by March 15th of each year with the Department, the issuing authority, and the operator's local office, where they shall be available for public inspection. If an operator amends its billing practices notice, work order, or subscriber bill after submitting the annual filing, it shall file copies of the amendments with the Department, the issuing authority, and the operator's local office.
- (3) At least 30 days prior to implementing a change of one of its billing practices, the cable television operator shall notify in writing the Department, the issuing authority, and all affected subscribers of the change and shall include in the notice a description of the changed practice.
- (4) Statements about billing practices in work orders, marketing, materials, and other documents shall be consistent with the billing practices notice.

10.02: Services, Rates and Charges Notice

- (1) Upon request, a cable television operator shall give notice of its services, rates, and charges to potential subscribers before a subscription agreement is reached. Otherwise, a cable television operator shall give notice of its services, rates, and charges to subscribers at the time a subscription agreement is reached.
- (2) At least 30 days prior to implementing an increase in one of its rates, charges, or fees, or a substantial change in the number or type of programming services, the cable operator shall notify, in writing, the Department, the issuing authority, and all affected subscribers of the change and shall include a description of the increased rate or charge. The notice shall list the old and new rate or charge and, if applicable, the old and new programming services provided. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a cable television operator shall not be required to provide prior notice of any rate change that is the result of a regulatory fee, franchise fee, or any other fee, tax, assessment, or charge of any kind imposed by any federal or state agency or franchising authority on the transaction between the operator and the subscriber. An operator shall notify in writing, the Department, the issuing authority, and all affected subscribers of any such change as soon as possible.
- (3) Every cable television operator shall fully disclose in writing all of its programming services and rates, upon request from a subscriber.
- (4) Every cable television operator shall fully disclose in writing all of its charges for installation, disconnection, downgrades and upgrades, reconnection, additional outlets, and rental, purchase, and replacement due to damage or theft of equipment or devices used in relation to cable services, upon request from a subscriber.

10.02: continued

- (5) Every cable television operator shall provide written notice of the charge, if any, for service visits and under what circumstances such charge will be imposed, upon request from a subscriber.
- (6) A copy of the cable operator's programming services, rates, and charges shall be filed by March 15th of each year with the Department, the issuing authority, and the operator's local office where it shall be made available for public inspection. If an operator amends its notice after the annual filing, it shall file a copy of the amendment with the Department, the issuing authority, and the operator's local office.
- (7) A cable operator shall not charge a subscriber for any service or equipment that the subscriber has not affirmatively requested by name. This provision, however, shall not preclude the addition or deletion of a specific program from a service offering, the addition or deletion of specific channels from an existing tier of service, or the restructuring or division of existing tiers of service that do not result in a fundamental change in the nature of an existing service or tier of service.

10.03: Form of Bill

- (1) The bill for cable television service shall contain the following information in clear, concise, and understandable language and format:
 - (a) the name, local address and telephone number of the cable television operator. The telephone number shall be displayed in a conspicuous location on the bill and shall be accompanied by a statement that the subscriber may call this number with any questions or complaints about the bill and or subscribers rights under 207 CMR 10.07 in the event of a billing dispute;
 - (b) the period of time over which each chargeable service is billed including prorated periods as a result of establishment and termination of service;
 - (c) the dates on which individually chargeable services were rendered or any applicable credits were applied;
 - (d) separate itemization of each rate, charge, or fee levied or credit applied, including but not be limited to, basic, premium service, and equipment charges, as well as any unit, pay-per-view, or per item charges or fees;
 - (e) the amount of the bill for the current billing period, separate from any prior balance due; and
 - (f) the date on which payment is due from the subscriber.
- (2) Cable operators may identify as a separate line item of each regular subscriber bill the following:
 - (a) The amount of the total bill assessed as a franchise fee and the identity of the franchising authority to whom the fee is paid;
 - (b) The amount of the total bill assessed to satisfy any requirements imposed on the cable operator by the franchise agreement to support public, educational, or governmental channels or the use of such channels;
 - (c) The amount of any other fee, tax, assessment, or charge of any kind imposed by any governmental authority on the transaction between the operator and the subscriber. In order for a governmental fee or assessment to be separately identified under 207 CMR 10.03, it must be directly imposed by a governmental body on a transaction between a subscriber and an operator.
- (3) All itemized costs shall be direct and verifiable. Each cable operator shall maintain a document in its public file which shall be available upon request and shall provide the accounting justification for all itemized costs appearing on the bill.

10.04: Advance Billing and Issuance of Bill

- (1) In the absence of a license provision further limiting the period of advance billing, a cable operator may, under uniform, nondiscriminatory terms and conditions, require payment not more than two months prior to the last day of a service period.
- (2) A cable subscriber may voluntarily offer and a cable operator may accept advance payments for periods greater than two months.
- (3) Upon request, a cable television operator shall provide subscribers with a written statement of account for each billing period and a final bill at the time of disconnection.

10.05: Billing Due Dates, Delinquency, Late Charges and Termination of Service

- (1) Subscriber payment to a cable operator is due on the due date marked on the bill, which shall be a date certain and in no case a statement that the bill is due upon receipt. The due date shall not be less than five business days following the mailing date of the bill.
- (2) A subscriber account shall not be considered delinquent unless payment has not been received by the cable operator at least 30 days after the bill due date.
- (3) The following provisions shall apply to the imposition of late charges on cable subscribers:
 - (a) A cable television operator shall not impose a late charge on a subscriber unless a subscriber is delinquent, the operator has given the subscriber a written late charge notice in a clear and conspicuous manner, and the subscriber has been given at least eight business days from the date of delinquency to pay the balance due.
 - (b) A charge of not more than 5% of the balance due may be imposed as a one-time late charge.
 - (c) No late charge may be assessed on the amount of a bill in dispute.
- (4) A cable television operator shall not terminate a subscriber's service unless the subscriber is delinquent, the cable operator has given the subscriber a separate written notice of termination in a clear and conspicuous manner, and the subscriber has been given at least eight business days from the mailing of the notice of termination to pay the balance due. A notice of termination shall not be mailed to subscribers until after the date of delinquency.
- (5) A cable television operator shall not assess a late charge on a bill or discontinue a subscriber's cable television service solely because of the nonpayment of the disputed portion of a bill during the period established by 207 CMR 10.07 for registration of a complaint with the operator or during the process of a dispute resolution mechanism recognized under 207 CMR 10.07.
- (6) Any charge for returned checks shall be reasonably related to the costs incurred by the cable operator in processing such checks.

10.06: Charges for Disconnection or Downgrading of Service

- (1) A cable television operator may impose a charge reasonably related to the cost incurred for a downgrade of service, except that no such charge may be imposed when:
 - (a) A subscriber requests total disconnection from cable service; or
 - (b) A subscriber requests the downgrade within the 30 day period following the notice of a rate increase or a substantial change in the number or type of programming services relative to the service(s) in question.
- (2) If a subscriber requests disconnection from cable television service prior to the effective date of an increase in rates, the subscriber shall not be charged the increased rate if the cable television operator fails to disconnect service prior to the effective date. Any subscriber who has paid in advance for the next billing period and who requests disconnection from service shall receive from the cable operator a prorated refund of any amounts paid in advance.

10.07: Billing Disputes

- (1) Every cable television operator shall have established procedures for prompt investigation of any billing dispute registered by a subscriber. The procedures shall provide at least 30 days from the due date of the bill for the subscriber to register a complaint. The cable television operator shall notify the subscriber of the result of its investigation and give an explanation for its decision within 30 business days of receipt of the complaint.
- (2) The subscriber forfeits any rights under 207 CMR 10.07 if he or she fails to pay an undisputed balance within 30 days of the bill due date.
- (3) Any subscriber who disagrees with the results of the cable television operator's investigation must promptly inquire about and take advantage of any complaint resolution mechanism, formal or informal, available under the license or through the issuing authority before the Department may accept a petition filed under 207 CMR 10.07(4).
- (4) The subscriber or the cable television operator may petition the Department to resolve disputed matters within 30 days of any final action by the cable operator. Final action under 207 CMR 10.07(3) shall be deemed to have occurred 30 days after the filing of a complaint.
- (5) Upon receipt of a petition, the Department may proceed to resolve the dispute if all parties agree to submit the dispute to the Department and be bound by the Department's decision and the Department obtains a statement signed by the parties indicating that agreement. In resolving the dispute, the Department may receive written or oral statements from the parties, and may conduct its own investigation. The Department shall then issue a decision based on the record and the parties shall receive written notification of the decision and a statement of reasons therefor.

10.08: Security Deposits

- (1) A cable operator shall not require from any cable subscriber a security deposit for converters or other equipment in excess of the cost of the equipment.
- (2) The cable operator shall pay interest to the cable subscriber at a rate of 7% per year for any deposit held for six months or more, and such interest shall accrue from the date the deposit is made by the cable subscriber. Interest shall be paid annually by the cable operator to the cable subscriber, either as a direct payment or as a credit to the cable subscriber's account.
- (3) Within 30 days after the return of the converter or other equipment, the cable operator shall return the security deposit plus any accrued interest to the cable subscriber, either as a direct payment or as a credit to the cable subscriber's account.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

207 CMR 10.00: 47 U.S.C. § 552, M.G.L. c. 166A, §§ 2A, 3, 5(1), 10, 16, and 17.