



### **Local, Regional, and Long Distance Calls:**

A local call is any call within your local calling area of telephone exchanges. For example, a call from Boston to Brookline would be considered a local call. See your white pages telephone directory for the communities that you may call under your local rate. Telephone exchange boundaries often are not the same as municipal boundaries. Most customers subscribe to unlimited local calling, which means that they pay a flat monthly rate for all local calls.

A regional toll call (sometimes referred to as local toll) is a call to a phone number that is not considered local, but is also not long distance. Regional toll calls may be billed at a different rate from your local calls. A call from Boston to Worcester would be a regional toll call. Some calling plans include a flat-rate option for regional toll calls.

Long distance calls are calls made to other states or between Western Massachusetts and Eastern Massachusetts, specifically, to or from the 413 area code.

**When selecting a telephone carrier** (phone service provider) you select a carrier for three types of calls: local, regional (local toll), and long distance. You may use the same carrier for more than one type of call or different carriers for each type of call. For example, you may use carrier A for local calls and carrier B for regional toll and long distance; you may use carrier C for local and regional calls and carrier D for long distance; you may use carrier F for local, regional, and long distance. You may also choose not to select a carrier for long distance. If you do, you should be aware of casual billing rates. (See below).

### **Calling Plans:**

Your calling plan contains the rates and fees that you have with your telephone carrier for the calls that you make. Calling plans generally offer a discount from the casual or basic rate, which applies if you have no calling plan. (For example, ABC phone company may offer a calling plan with a rate of 10¢ a minute for evenings and weekends and 15¢ a minute during the weekday business hours. Without a calling plan ABC Company may charge 35¢ a minute for all calls. Consumers who wish to have their calls carried by ABC company are better off selecting a calling plan, which is typically done when the consumer first calls the company to select them as their phone service provider. If a consumer selects a telephone carrier, but does not select a calling plan, the consumer will likely pay the highest rate offered by the company -- its casual billing rate. **Always select a calling plan from the telephone carrier to avoid being billed at the casual (or basic) rate.** Companies often have a number of different calling plans to choose from. If you choose not to have a long distance carrier make sure that you cannot be casually billed by a provider unless you want this service.

Most telephone companies also offer a toll-free access number for use from pay-telephone or other public locations, such as hotels and hospitals. If you do not use an access code, you will be charged by the long distance company chosen by the telephone owner, and the rates may be much higher than you would pay if you used your own company's access code.

### **Slamming**

A slam is switching your telephone service without your permission. Slamming can occur with your local, regional (local toll), or long distance service.

### **Things to do to avoid being slammed:**

#### **Read promotional material:**

Before signing a document or endorsing a check from a telephone carrier, read it to see if you are authorizing a change to your telephone carrier. Some consumers receive a check in the mail and the signing and cashing of that check changes the telephone carrier.

#### **Consider a Freeze:**

Known in the telecom industry as a "PIC Freeze," this option tells your local telephone service provider to "freeze" your service to your current carrier and not allow a switch to any other carrier unless you, as the customer of record, verify that you want to switch by contacting your local telephone service provider. This option may reduce the incidence of slams but it does not completely eliminate them. However, a "freeze" may make it more difficult to change to a lower priced or better service later because you will have to undo the freeze before you may switch your service.

### **What telephone carriers do to legitimately switch your carrier:**

When **you** are contacted by a telephone carrier to switch to their service and you wish to make

the switch the carrier is required to document your authorization. In Massachusetts this is done by either a (1) "Letter of Agency" or (2) a third party verification. A "Letter of Agency" is a document that the customer with authority to make the switch must sign stating that he/she wishes to switch telephone providers. Third party verification is done by a company other than the telephone carrier, in which they ask the customer with the authority to make the switch (1) if he/she wishes to switch carriers, (2) the new carrier he/she wishes to switch to, and (3) the phone number(s) being switched. Telephone carriers who switch a customer's service without a Letter of Agency or third party verification may be found to have slammed the customer.

### **What to do if you are slammed or you suspect you have been slammed:**

#### **Verify your telephone carrier:**

From your home phone call 1-(your area code)-700-4141 to check your regional service carrier. Call 1-700-555-4141 to check your long distance carrier. A recording will state which carrier is connected to your line. Also check your bill for the name of the carrier. To verify your local carrier, contact the company billing you for local calls to determine whether it is your local carrier.

#### **Request a refund and to be switched back to your original carrier:**

If your carrier was switched without your authorization call your local telephone carrier and your original carrier to arrange to be switched back immediately at no charge. Tell the unauthorized carrier that the switch occurred without authorization and you wish to be switched back to your original carrier. You have a right to a refund if the switch was unauthorized and if you were charged a switching fee or if you were billed at a higher rate than your original carrier's rates.

#### **File a complaint:**

If your carrier was switched without your authorization you may file a complaint with the Consumer Division of the Department of Telecommunications and Energy once you have a written notice of the switch (e.g. a bill or letter from your old carrier) by calling 1-800-392-6066 (within Massachusetts) or 1-617-305-3531. You must file your complaint no later than 90 days after learning of the switch in service.