

GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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NEWS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:****March 31, 1998**

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PHONE CUSTOMERS TO VOTE ON LARGER TOLL-FREE CALLING AREAS**Ballots to be mailed March 31**

ATLANTA -- Over the next few days telephone customers in hundreds of cities throughout Georgia will receive ballots from the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) seeking public opinion on whether to raise basic service rates in exchange for expanded toll-free calling to nearby communities. In addition to the 1100 calling routes to be considered through balloting, 77 routes are expected to go into effect automatically.

Legislation passed last year by the General Assembly in House Bill 888 calls for the PSC to implement toll-free calling between communities where the central telephone offices are twenty-two (22) miles or less apart. While the approved routes may be toll-free, an increase in basic service rates may be necessary to compensate telephone companies for the loss in toll revenue.

Pursuant to H.B. 888, the PSC will automatically implement routes where the basic service rate increase is less than \$2.00 or 25% of the basic monthly rate. Where increases are greater than \$2.00, ballots are sent out to telephone customers listing the proposed rate increase and the new exchanges that consumers would be able to call if the measure were approved. The ballots will be mailed March 31 and need to be completed and received by the PSC no later than April 18, 1998.

"Customers who regularly call into the proposed exchanges will most likely save money and should consider voting for the measure," said Commissioner Bobby Baker. "However, if a customer rarely calls into the proposed exchange, the rate increase may be greater than what the customer normally pays in long distance charges every month," he added.

"If the majority of customers in each community return ballots in favor of the measure, toll-free calling will begin by June 1," said Commissioner Baker.

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Note to Media: Basic service rate increases for all the BellSouth exchanges are not expected to be above \$2.00. However, the actual increase will depend on ballot results of independent telephone company routes.