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CONTACT: Bart Gobeil, Public Relations

(404) 656-6558 or 1-800-282-5813

GEORGIA MOVES ONE STEP CLOSER TO FULL LOCAL PHONE COMPETITION

ATLANTA – Yesterday the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) voted unanimously to order BellSouth to retain two independent firms to perform an audit to determine whether its operational support systems (OSS) are ready to handle full competition in the company's local exchange areas.

By directing BellSouth to have these audits performed, Georgia will be the first state in the company's service area to engage in third party testing of its OSS. This initiative, along with on-going supplemental trial testing of local competition in BellSouth's service area, will allow Georgia to continue to be a leading state in the deregulation of the telecommunications industry.

The Commission's decision will direct the focus of the testing on those areas where BellSouth has not yet experienced significant commercial usage during the trial testing period and where CLECs have expressed concerns regarding operational readiness.

BellSouth will have ten days to file with the Commission detailed plans as to the implementation of the testing, including the names of the two independent firms that will conduct the audit and dates on which progress reports will be filed and the testing ultimately will be completed.

"Since we began trial testing of local competition over fifteen months ago, we have seen some steady enhancements in BellSouth's systems. This third-party testing will validate for us, as well as for other outside parties, that the BellSouth system is approaching the point where full competition may be introduced" commented Commission David Burgess. He added, "Although BellSouth will be choosing the auditing companies and will formulate the testing plan, this Commission will closely scrutinize the plan it brings before us. If BellSouth's plan is not a responsible one, we will send it back until the company gets it right".

The Commission's order today was the result of a motion made by Commissioner Burgess, who served as the Director of the PSC's Telecommunications Division for the past two years before being appointed Commissioner by Governor Barnes last month.

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