

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 3, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

We write today on behalf of American cable and broadband consumers who are finding themselves with few choices when it comes to purchasing broadband internet and cable television services. A lack of competition in the market has left many Americans without robust options when purchasing cable and broadband. As of February 2015, 55 percent of consumers only have one high-speed broadband provider. This lack of competition, in our view, has led to some troubling and questionable customer service and payment practices by the few corporations consumers have to choose from. In 2015, more than 30 percent of consumer complaints to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about Internet service and 38 percent of complaints about TV service were regarding billing. Furthermore, billing was the category with the highest number of complaints for both Internet and TV.

For example, equipment rental charges are one of the numerous and often obtuse fees consumers face in this increasingly concentrated cable and broadband market. In particular, Comcast charges a monthly modem rental fee of \$10—recently increased from \$8—and makes an estimated \$275 to \$300 million a quarter from these fees. Thankfully, consumers are able to purchase their own modems and routers instead of renting through the company.

We are troubled upon hearing complaints of consumers being charged the modem rental fee after they have returned the rented equipment to Comcast or being charged the rental fee having never rented a modem in the first place. Not only are the majority of customers using automatic payment systems and may not personally authorize every erroneous charge, many consumers report having to call and remedy this problem throughout several billing cycles. In fact, customer help boards found online at Comcast's Help and Support Forum contain complaints about this exact problem.

Given the numerous fees consumers face, we find it possible consumers face erroneous and unauthorized charges for equipment rental. In light of these concerns, we would like to ask the following questions of the FCC:

- 1) Does the FCC regulate erroneous equipment fees charged to consumers, including but not limited to charges for non-existent rentals, that consumers are being told are 'oversights'? If so, how is that regulation occurring?
- 2) With its regulatory authority, does the FCC have records or a database of such erroneous charges for equipment? If so, how many American consumers have been

charged an equipment fee they did not owe, and how many total equipment fees for cable and broadband services have been charged to American consumers?

- 3) How many consumers have complained to the FCC about incorrect cable and broadband equipment fees, and over what period of time? And what action has been taken by the FCC if such complaints have been made?

Given the power big corporations have over American consumers, the need to stop unfair billing practices and ensure affordable cable and Internet services for all Americans is all the more important. Thank you in advance for your response to our request.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Al Franken
U.S. Senator



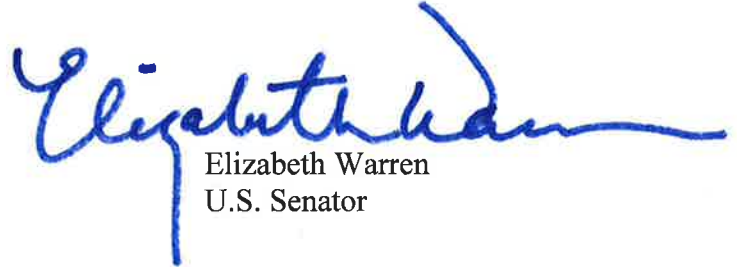
Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator



Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator