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### Why pay \$80 a year for phone repairs you never use Clinic teaches consumers to inspect their bills

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DECATUR - The trouble with phone bills is that overwhelming urge to pay them - whatever amount they ask for. Dale and Jeannette Elliott have been doing that with their AT&T landline bill for half a century. But not any more. They visited a free phone bill clinic at the Macon County Senior Center on Wednesday and left doubting the worth of a \$6.99 monthly fee for a service that will cover line repairs inside their home.

The Citizen's Utility Board consumer watchdog group, which ran the bill clinic, says most customers might need an in-home line repair maybe once in 20 or 30 years.

"Now \$6.99 a month doesn't seem like very much," said Dale Elliott, 74.

"But then they remind you (at the clinic) that is 80-some dollars a year. And we've been paying that for years □ who knows how many years?" he added, as his wife nods in agreement.

"I knew the charge was there on the bill," said Jeannette Elliott, 70. "But I didn't know what to do about it."

The utility board says hang it up, along with extra fees for other bells and whistles customers get sold but aren't worth the expense. And while the clinic focused on landlines, utility board experts were also on hand to dissect cell phone bills so that when it comes time to renew the plan, customers can choose options that will cost them less.

Wednesday's clinic was brought to Decatur in arrangement with state Rep. Bob Flider, D-Mount Zion, with a morning session at the Senior Center and an afternoon one at the Macon County Office Building. Phone traffic was brisk - with some 40 consumers helped in the first hour and a half after the clinic at the Senior Center opened.

Sarah Moskowitz, the utility board's outreach manager, said savings found on the typical landline bill are worth \$17 a month. One Decatur customer, however, had been shown they were paying more than \$26 in phone charges they didn't need.

"There is just so much stuff on your phone bill, it's hard to tell what is optional and what you have to pay," Moskowitz said. "And, unfortunately, customer service representatives at phone companies are under intense pressure to sell you things."

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