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CUB: Saving on phone bill a good call

Advocacy group's clinic teaches consumers how to reduce their rates

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PEORIA — The average person could save \$17 a month on their phone bills, a leading advocacy group says. And in this economic climate, many could use that extra \$204 a year.

About 40 people stopped by a free clinic Tuesday at the Illinois Central College North Campus sponsored by the Citizens Utility Board of Illinois - an advocacy group touring the state helping people lower their gas, electric and telephone rates.

CUB representatives were on hand to evaluate consumers' phone bills in one-on-one meetings and offer them advice on how to reduce their rates.

"Utility bills are one of the first, most obvious places to start when trying to cut back," said Sarah Moskowitz, outreach director of CUB. "We'll look at folks' phone bills and tell them what they need."

Lowering rates often involves downgrading to a different plan, she added.

The clinic is part of CUB's 25th anniversary of its "Right Call Campaign," which began after the group released a report showing that Illinois callers were overpaying on their phone bills by about \$1.5 billion a year.

Because of high demands for CUB services, it's the third time the group has visited Peoria this year.

The event was sponsored by state Sen. Dale Risinger, R-Peoria, who invited the group because of the immediate assistance it offers, said Shirley Johnson, outreach coordinator for the senator.

"This empowers the citizens and equips them for what they need to take on the big corporations," Johnson said, adding that senior citizens sometimes are the ones who need the most help.

Of those who took part in the clinic, the majority were senior citizens.

John Torset, 69, of Hanna City attended because of what he calls "commercial abuse."

"I'm a consumer," he said after meeting with CUB staff. "I recognize abuse when it happens."

He has a cell phone plan that charges him for more than 700 minutes a month, though he said he uses less than half of those minutes. CUB staff members advised him of his right to negotiate his plan with his cell phone provider.

Moskowitz said there are many cases where phone companies talk consumers into packages they do not need.

"We tell them what their rights are," she added.

For more information on CUB's services, call the consumer hotline at (800) 669-5556 or visit www.citizensutilityboard.org.

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