



## Groups may be dialing up the heat in fight over Verizon sale

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SPRINGFIELD -- Verizon's bid to get out of the rural telephone business in Illinois may be meeting some resistance.

A labor union, consumer advocates and the Illinois attorney general are among the groups asking to weigh in on the telephone giant's plan to shed nearly 600,000 mostly rural customers from the northwest corner of the state to southern Illinois.

The proposed sale of local access lines in Illinois is part of an \$8.6 billion deal Verizon announced in May.

The company wants to sell a total of 4.8 million local access lines in 14 states to Connecticut-based Frontier Communications. Among those affected in Illinois are about 573,000 customers in mostly smaller towns and rural areas.

The sale needs the approval of state and federal regulators. A tentative outline shows the Illinois Commerce Commission hopes to make a decision by next May.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the Citizens Utility Board all have sought to have their voices heard as the case winds its way through the ICC proceedings.

"We want to make sure that consumers are protected," said CUB executive director David Kolata.

In a petition seeking to intervene in the case, the IBEW says it is concerned about Frontier's financial and managerial ability to take on the additional customers.

Cable TV giant Comcast, which also provides digital telephone service, also wants to weigh in, saying the proposed sale could affect its business.

Madigan's office is reviewing the proposal and plans to file an analysis in the coming weeks.

"We are aware of the concerns about this," Madigan spokeswoman Robyn Ziegler said Tuesday.

### Same battle in other states?

It's not clear yet whether the sale in Illinois will trigger the same kind of battling seen in other states.

In West Virginia, for example, the sale is drawing opposition from labor unions and the attorney general over concerns about the cost and quality of service once the transition from Verizon to Frontier is complete.

The proposed deal comes as cell phones have surpassed landline phone service in households having only one type of service.

Against that backdrop, Verizon has been trying to sell off its rural access lines in order to concentrate its offerings in more populated areas.

Doug Dougherty, president of the Illinois Telecommunications Association, said each of the groups involved in the discussions will be seeking to make sure the ICC puts suitable conditions on the sale so that services and jobs will be preserved or improved.

"I think there is some amount of comfort that the ICC has done this before," Dougherty said. "There is a belief out there that the commission will listen and make the right decision."

Frontier spokesman Steve Crosby acknowledged the sale has triggered fireworks in other states, but said he's not sure it will be as controversial in Illinois.

"People are throwing up a lot of mud on the walls to see what sticks," said Crosby. "I'm hoping its not contentious."