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AT&T calling plans dial in savings, CUB says

By TONY REID - H&R Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, July 8, 2010 4:01 am

DECATUR - The Citizens Utility Board isn't in the phone business but said it's got a deal for AT&T customers that's too good to hang up on.

Representatives of CUB, a utility watchdog based in Chicago, visited Decatur on Wednesday to remind families of three cheap "Consumer's Choice" AT&T calling plans.

The plans have been around since a legal settlement was worked out between CUB and AT&T in 2006, and they were extended through 2013 in the Telecommunications Act signed by Gov. Pat Quinn in June.

A study by CUB estimates Illinois families are overspending on local, long distance and wireless service by more than \$1 billion a year. The study also found the Consumer's Choice plans could be trimming local service phone bills by \$485 million a year.

"The Consumer's Choice plans are a lean alternative to the bloated, all-you-can-eat phone packages often pushed by phone companies," said CUB outreach director Sarah Moskowitz. "Consumer's Choice plans give callers the services they need, without the hefty price tag. That's good news in any economy."

The cheapest plan is Consumer's Choice Basic at \$9.50 a month. The cost covers AT&T's basic line charge and 30 local phone calls; after 30 calls, the rate is 6 cents per local call.

Consumer's Choice Extra costs \$15 per month with unlimited local phone calls but no calling features. This is the best plan, CUB says, for users who don't want bells and whistles and make roughly 100 local calls a month.

Consumer's Choice Plus is priced at \$19.70 a month and comes with two features, such as caller ID and voice mail, and offers unlimited local calls. None of the plans cover long distance calling, but CUB said it has searched providers and recommends Pioneer Telephone, which offers long distance rates of 2 to 3 cents per minute.

Bryan McDaniel, senior policy analyst with CUB, said the Consumer's Choice plans also include "service quality standards" to protect customers.

"If your phone line goes out, you receive a credit," he said. "And if AT&T makes an appointment with you and misses it, you get a \$50 credit on your bill."

CUB has advice and tips on cutting your cell phone bills, too. Go to its Phone Savings Center at www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org. AT&T customers can get a free phone bill analysis by calling 1-800-669-5556.

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