



Citizens Utility Board

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CUB OFFERS FIRST-EVER GUIDE TO HELP PAY-TV CUSTOMERS SAVE MONEY, AS IL POLLS SHOW STRONG BACKING FOR INDUSTRY REFORMS, CHEAPER TV OPTIONS

Reacting to public opinion polls it conducted that show Illinois consumers are hungry for lower cable/satellite TV bills and support sweeping industry reforms, the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) on Tuesday released its first-ever guide to help TV viewers cut costs.

Illinois consumers should visit www.CUBCableCenter.com to receive a free copy of *CUB's Guide to Cutting Your TV Costs*. Visitors to the online center can also take a survey on pay-TV service and give their opinions on reforming the industry. (On midnight, Sunday, Dec. 18, CUB will randomly select one survey taker to win \$50 off his or her cable bill.)

The guide includes tips on how consumers can reduce TV bills, and it details the pros and cons of various choices in the market. Those choices include cable, satellite and triple-play bundles, as well as cable alternatives, such as new streaming services for people who want to “cut the cord.”

“People don’t feel like they have a lot of options when it comes to their monthly TV bills,” CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. “That’s why we’ve created this guide—to empower Illinois consumers and give them an easy-to-understand checklist of actions they can take to cut their TV costs.”

CUB investigated if public polling supported the impromptu comments about cable service it has heard for three decades from consumers who contact the utility watchdog seeking guidance on telecommunications, electric or natural gas issues. In late October and early November, the consumer group conducted a series of Google Consumer Surveys of randomly selected people (25 and older) from every corner of Illinois. Each question was asked independently and had at least 1,000 respondents among people surfing the Internet to read online content. The survey results were statistically significant, with a margin of error no greater than +/-3.1 percent.

One survey found that 75 percent of respondents with pay-TV service said their bills were too high. Expensive bills appear to be a chief factor in a migration away from traditional pay TV. Another survey found that 76.6 percent of customers who have “cut the cord” said they left their cable/satellite company because of high bills.

Illinois consumers also showed strong support for a series of reforms in the industry that would amount to a “Cable Customer’s Bill of Rights.” The following are the reforms and the percentage of respondents who supported them.

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- Requiring pay-TV companies to offer a basic, low-cost package that any customer could choose: 70.8 percent.
- Requiring reforms aimed at reducing excessive cable box fees: 71.4 percent.
- Requiring pay-TV companies to offer a-la-carte programming (only paying for the channels you use): 71.1 percent.
- Requiring pay-TV companies to offer a low-cost plan for senior citizens: 69.8 percent.
- Requiring pay-TV companies to allow customers to cancel service online, without having to call: 68.7 percent.

“It’s obvious Illinois consumers are hungry for changes in the pay-TV industry, but reforms usually don’t come quickly,” Kolata said. “CUB’s guide focuses on what consumers can do today to help reduce their bills.”

CUB’s Guide to Cutting Your TV Costs includes sections explaining how to deal with customer service; tips on cutting your current pay-TV bill, and alternatives to traditional cable service—including new streaming services as well as simply using an antenna. Kolata said new customers in the pay-TV industry often get the best deals, while the longest, most loyal customers end up paying more.

“Based on complaints we hear, pay TV is one of the few industries where the longer you are a customer, the more you get charged,” he said. “CUB’s guide tries to help customers fix that.”

CUB’s Guide to Cutting Your TV Costs is free, at www.CUBCableCenter.com.

CUB is Illinois’ leading nonprofit utility watchdog. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, it has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping to block rate hikes and secure refunds. For more information, call CUB’s Consumer Hotline, 1-800-669-5556, or visit its award-winning website, www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

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