



**CWA**

# **FCC'S COPPER RETIREMENT ORDER ABANDONS CUSTOMERS AND UNION JOBS**

A 2026 FCC Network Modernization Order (NMO) preempts state authority over phone service, speeds up copper retirement, and lets carriers walk away from the customers and workers who built the network. Major providers (including AT&T and Verizon) pushed for this outcome and are now taking full advantage, seeking expedited approval to discontinue copper in the coming months, abandoning customers and eliminating union jobs.

## **WHAT THE ORDER DOES**

- The FCC's March 2026 Network Modernization Order drives a nationwide shift to all-IP networks by the end of 2028, preempting state Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) rules that guaranteed basic phone service to every address.
- Discontinuance applications are now auto-approved in just 31 days, with no evidentiary review and a shrunken public-comment window.
- Carriers can replace wireline phone service with mobile wireless (speeds as low as 5/1 Mbps) or satellite and call it an "adequate replacement."
- Formal FCC review and approvals are replaced by carrier website postings, limiting the ability of regulators and the public to object.

## **JOBS ON THE LINE**

- Every mile of copper retired and not upgraded with fiber negatively impacts union jobs that carriers are eager to shed.
- Streamlined discontinuance lets carriers walk away from service areas and staffing commitments with far less public accountability than before.
- Weaker outage and service-quality reporting makes it harder to hold carriers accountable for the staffing and maintenance it takes to keep networks running.

## **CONSUMERS LEFT EXPOSED**

- COLR protections guaranteed phone service to every home, including the most rural. The federal government is attempting to preempt state-administered protections for access to reliable voice service just as the FCC has itself reduced consumer protections.
- FCC backup-power notification requirements expired in 2025, leaving many families without a guaranteed way to reach 911 in a blackout.

- Fire alarms, medical-alert pendants, and elevator phones are susceptible to failure when copper lines are swapped for wireless adapters.
- Some providers, like AT&T, are separately asking the FCC to allow the company to relinquish its status as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier, thereby eliminating requirements to participate in the low-income Lifeline subsidy program, certify service-quality metrics, and report outages.

## **CWA IS FIGHTING BACK — ON EVERY FRONT**

- CWA intervened in AT&T v. CPUC, and succeeded in pausing AT&T's bid to block California's COLR rules while the case moves forward.
- CWA has strategically intervened in state and federal regulatory proceedings to oppose AT&T's and Verizon/Frontier's discontinuance, preemption, and ETC petitions at the FCC.

## **BUILDING STATE OVERSIGHT, STATE BY STATE**

CWA is fighting to re-regulate broadband at the federal and state level.

*Federal:* CWA has petitioned the FCC to classify VoIP as a Title II common carrier telecommunications service and adopt rules for the transition from copper to fiber that don't leave communities and workers behind. CWA is also working to reform the Universal Service Fund so that universal service support obligations are updated for the broadband era.

*State:* CWA has a model bill to assert state authority over broadband and VoIP through its state public utility commission (the agency name varies by state). The bill specifically asserts the need for state oversight of network resiliency and backup power, public safety and 911, service-quality standards, and transparency and consumer protection. In the 2026 legislative session, CWA worked with legislators to file bills in AZ, CO, DE, NY, MD, and WA.

## **CONGRESS MUST ACT AS A CHECK ON THE FCC**

Chairman Carr has moved this agenda through FCC orders and streamlined staff approvals without meaningful public input. Congress must act as a check on decisions that affect millions of households. Congress has real tools here, including: oversight hearings, letters demanding answers from the Commission, and policy directives in funding bills. Members of both parties have constituents affected by this transition, and CWA is working to get members of Congress on record supporting a pro-worker outcome.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

You can contribute to the union's efforts to document the harms of unaccountable copper retirement. We are collecting stories from residents and workers about how the copper retirement process is playing out in the real world and the challenges with getting an adequate, affordable replacement service. Work with your local to collect stories and submit them at this link: [CWA.org/CopperStories](https://CWA.org/CopperStories)