



The end of AT&T's Consumer's Choice plans

What happened?

AT&T ended the Consumer's Choice plans, Illinois' best local phone deals, in November 2017. Consumer's Choice customers were switched to identical offers that are more expensive.

Why did this happen?

In July 2017, the Illinois General Assembly passed a rewrite of the state Telecommunications Act, and AT&T successfully lobbied to end the Act's requirement that it offer the three Consumer's Choice plans: Basic, Extra and Plus.

The plans were originally created by CUB in a

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legal settlement with AT&T about a decade ago, and their prices—all less than \$20—were under a legislatively mandated price freeze. They were the best local phone deals in Illinois, if not the country.

So what are my choices?

Consumer's Choice customers who did not take action were automatically switched to alternative AT&T plans. These new offers appeared to be identical to Consumer's Choice plans—except they're more expensive. Remember that the new plans' prices are not under a price freeze, like the Consumer's Choice plans. So these prices could go up. Check your bill each month!

The chart below summarizes the new plans.

Plan	The monthly fee you pay	Plan details (Same as Consumer's Choice plans)
Call Plan 30	Downtown Chicago: \$7.25 Rest of Chicago and adjacent suburbs: \$10.25 Rest of Illinois: \$13.50	30 local (bands A and B) calls (to places within 15 miles of your home). Additional local calls are 6 cents each.
Local Unlimited Package	Downtown Chicago: \$13 Rest of Chicago and adjacent suburbs: \$16 Rest of Illinois: \$15.50-\$16.50	Unlimited local (bands A and B) calls.
Illinois Complete Choice Basic	Downtown Chicago: \$20 Rest of Chicago and adjacent suburbs: \$23 Rest of Illinois: \$23.75	Unlimited local calls (bands A and B) and two calling features.

Do these plans impact local toll or long-distance calls?

No. These plans are local phone deals, for calls to places within 15 miles from your home (what AT&T labels "Band A" and "Band B" calls). Calls beyond that—local toll (15-40 miles away) and long-distance (40+ miles away)—are not covered by these plans.

Are there other landline choices?

AT&T also markets Complete Choice Enhanced. It's \$40 per month and includes all local calls and up to 11 calling features.

Am I going to lose my landline?

In addition to eliminating the Consumer's Choice plans in the Illinois Telecom Act, AT&T also successfully lobbied the

General Assembly to eliminate the requirement that it offer traditional landline service in its Illinois territory. **However, that does not mean you are losing your landline immediately.** AT&T still must get final approval from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to eliminate traditional landlines for businesses and households in Illinois.

Under the legislation, AT&T has to give customers

255 days notice (roughly eight and a half months) before petitioning the FCC to end landline service in Illinois. After the bill passed in 2017, AT&T said traditional landline service is “not going away anytime soon...It could take a number of years.”

CUB will go before the FCC to fight to protect landline service as long as it can.

What are my choices beyond landlines?

AT&T offers alternatives to traditional landline service, but many of those options are either more expensive or less reliable, or both.

Cellphones: Most cellphone plans include unlimited talk and text, with data usage fees. Not including the cost of the phone itself, a single plan with unlimited talk and text and data usage ranges between \$30 and \$80, including monthly line fees. These are averages. Prices will vary based on the number of lines, and data plans vary across networks. Unlike traditional landlines, cellphones need to be charged, they can be plagued by poor service in “dead zones,” and they may leave 911 dispatchers guessing about your location.

Advanced 911 — which can trace the exact location of a cellphone — won’t be fully implemented in Illinois until 2020, at the earliest. Also, AT&T’s 14-state wireless 911 outage earlier this year doesn’t give traditional landline customers confidence that the company can provide satisfactory alternatives.

Bundled Packages: The AT&T service traditionally called “UVerse” includes a bundle of TV, Internet and home phone. For the first two-year contract, the company charges \$99.99 a month. Comcast offers a “Double Play” package that includes Internet service and home phone service for \$54.99 a month for the first year. Digital phone service like this requires a pricey broadband connection, and you can’t make calls during an Internet outage or a power outage (without a battery back-up).