

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS**  
**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS, LAND USE AND**  
**TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT**  
**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON NEW YORK CITY CABLE FRANCHISEE CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES**  
**TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2009**

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Good morning Chairs Comrie, Katz and Brewer, and members of the Consumer Affairs, Land Use, and Technology in Government Committees, respectively. My name is Mitchel Ahlbaum, the General Counsel and Deputy Commissioner for Franchise Administration and Planning for the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications. Joining me are Stanley Shor, DoITT's Assistant Commissioner for Franchise Administration, and Bruce Regal, Senior Counsel at the New York City Law Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the City's role in receiving and resolving consumer complaints related to cable television service.

When requiring assistance with cable television service, the first thing New Yorkers should do is to contact their cable provider's customer service center, the phone number for which is listed on all monthly statements. Every cable bill that goes monthly to all cable television subscribers in the City, whether by mail or online, also informs the subscriber that if a service problem is not satisfactorily resolved by the cable company, the subscriber may contact the City by phone at 311; by email via *NYC.gov*; or by regular mail directly to DoITT's cable customer service staff. This information is also provided in the welcome brochures, subscriber handbooks, and similar literature that each cable company makes available to its subscribers.

All 311 Customer Service Center call takers are equipped with scripts that enable them to receive complaints regarding cable service. The complaints are then referred to DoITT cable customer service staff who are specifically dedicated, on a full-time basis, to facilitating these complaints' resolution. Cable complaints received by DoITT are immediately recorded in the agency's database, and processed by our cable customer service staff. Every business day, our staff communicates by phone with the cable companies to ensure that complaints are resolved in a timely fashion.

The cable companies are required to make their best efforts to resolve all *service complaints* within two weeks and to resolve all *billing disputes* within four weeks. As reported through the biannual Mayor's Management Report, the percentage of all cable complaints resolved within 30 days has steadily improved: from 90% of complaints being resolved within 30 days in Fiscal 2006 to about 96% resolved within 30 days Fiscal 2007 and 2008; and to a resolution rate of over 99% during the first four months of Fiscal 2009. In the first four months of Fiscal 2009, the average time to resolve all *service-related* complaints was 11.8 days, and the average time to resolve all *billing* disputes was 24.1 days.

During calendar year 2008, DoITT cable customer service staff handled a total of 2,066 complaints related to the cable companies. Those complaints are categorized as follows: 1,405 (or 68%) were service-related; 393 (19%) were billing-related; 261 (12%) were miscellaneous in nature; and 7 (fewer than 1%) were "real estate"-related.

I would note that, under New York State law, monthly cable bills also inform subscribers that, as a further resource, they can contact the New York State Public Service Commission to help resolve a complaint. From time to time the Public Service Commission does receive complaints from New York City subscribers, and we are available to work with the PSC to assure these complaints are promptly resolved.

DoITT staff makes every effort to obtain satisfactory and timely resolution of issues that subscribers bring to our attention. We take this obligation very seriously, as I believe the statistics on timely resolution indicate – and we regularly consider ways of improving on our processes, as I think the numbers also indicate.

I would now be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.