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May 13, 2016

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Comcast Corp. expanded its discounted Internet Essentials program to older Philadelphians, the company said Thursday. The cable giant launched the program for older residents in Seattle, San Francisco, and Palm Beach County, Fla., last year and then agreed during cable-TV franchise negotiations with Philadelphia officials to add it here.

Internet Essentials entails high-speed broadband service for \$10 a month and since its inception in 2011 had been available only to low-income families with schoolchildren. Comcast did not have an estimate on how many Philadelphians at least 62 years old would be eligible. The program is being implemented by the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, a nonprofit that funds programs and advocates for seniors.

Internet Essentials won't be available for older residents in the Pennsylvania suburbs or South Jersey because it was negotiated as part of the Philadelphia franchise renewal, officials said. Older Philadelphians looking to apply can call 1-855-848-6348. To qualify, an individual needs to be enrolled in federal or state aid programs that include Medicaid, Section 8 housing assistance, and food stamps. "We're very excited that thousands of Philadelphians will get their first chance ever to access affordable internet," said Hannah Sassaman, policy director for the nonprofit Media Mobilizing Project.

Separately, Comcast said it wired the Philadelphia Zoo for free WiFi for the public, similar to SEPTA stations. Comcast also is sponsoring a social-media challenge in which people can post zoo pictures using #sendakid so that 10,000 low-income children can visit the zoo for free. — *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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Landline phone service is crucial for monitoring medical aids such as pacemakers and defibrillators. Panic sets in when service shuts down.

Frustrated Frontier Communications customers say assistance has not been rendered in emergency fashion. A pacemaker and a defibrillator closely monitored by two cardiologists and a fire-rescue department for Gail Hes' husband rely on landline phone service to their Wylie home. "Frontier basically said, 'Tough, we can't get to you until your scheduled appointment a week out.' This could potentially be life-threatening," she said.

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After Frontier took over Verizon customers on April 1, thousands of customers began complaining about horrible service. The Texas Public Utility Commission noticed and, on Wednesday, assembled a five-member team to investigate. That could potentially lead to fines.

“When you’re talking about a health issue and the company’s not being responsive, call our toll-free line, or [visit our website](#), if possible, and have the customer stress there is a health issue. And we’ll get word to the company as soon as possible,” PUC spokesperson Terry Hadley advised. The Heses’ service interruption May 5 also knocked out the direct connection to Wylie Fire Rescue, which keeps Morris’ health history in its computer system. “We are set up to get a service tech out today, but so far I have not heard that they’ve shown up,” she said Thursday evening. “The only reason we pay for a landline is so he can have the monitoring.”

The PUC has received over 500 complaints since April 1 with no signs of slowing. It forwards complaints about VoIP and Internet service to the Federal Communications Commission. “We’re very concerned with what appears to be the lack of response by the company,” Hadley said. “It is troubling that Frontier is not responding quickly.”

Acting Texas spokesman Liam Morrison [told Watchdog Dave Lieber](#), “There have been issues, but these affected less than a percent of our customers in total.” A Frontier representative assured the PUC during open meetings that the company is addressing the outages. “But as you know, we continue to get complaints at the same pace that started in early April,” Hadley said.

The Watchdog desk received nearly 100 emails and several handwritten letters about the #FrontierFail. Those are forwarded to Frontier. One recent victim is WFAA-TV (Channel 8) meteorologist, [Pete Delkus](#), who posted his complaint, like so many others, on social media.

Sarah Johnson of Plano is nervous about her service interruption in the middle of her health services search for her disabled husband, a WWII veteran. “Our landline has not worked for over a week and I have had to handle medical decisions,” she says. “Twice I have been guaranteed by Frontier that my phone would be fixed and twice no one has shown up to repair the line or called.” – *Dallas Morning News*

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Inmates at the Beaver County Jail will soon be watching cable television from Comcast instead of similar service from the Dish satellite network. The service isn’t underwritten by Beaver County taxpayers, jail Warden William Schouppe noted. It’s paid for by the jail’s inmate welfare fund.

The cable service had been unavailable because Comcast lines didn’t extend across the railroad tracks that separate the jail and other industrial properties in the area, just north of West Aliquippa accessed by the Henry Mancini Bridge. Until recently, Comcast wouldn’t pay for the \$27,000 cost to extend the lines. The Philadelphia-based company recently did so, and its rates are comparable to those paid to the Dish satellite service, Schouppe said.

It simplifies inmate access to television because a box isn’t required with cable service and inmates can’t attempt to make changes to the way the service is programmed or access channels they’re not allowed to, as has happened in the past, Schouppe said. Two televisions are in each of the six general-population pods at the jail, one in the female work-release unit and one in the special-needs unit. Inmates generally decide among themselves what channel they’ll be watching, but with Dish, inmates would try to use the remote control to reprogram the service, Schouppe said. With Comcast, that can’t happen because they’ll only be allowed to change channels, he said.

Comcast will also provide Internet service to the jail’s offices, he said. It also may allow the jail to look into future expansion of service to inmates if they should want to pay for

it. Some jails will lease a small television for use in an inmate's cell as a way to generate revenue. The jail will be looking into that in the future, Schoupe said. Other sites that are across the railroad tracks can now be serviced by Comcast, something that could benefit any future development adjacent to the jail. "It puts the infrastructure in place for other sites to tap into," Schoupe said. – **Beaver County Times**



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