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Bill No.: Senate Bill 458 – Senior Call Check In Program

Committee: Finance

Sponsor: Senator Kelley

Date: February 28, 2012

Position: Informational

Senate Bill 458 would allow the Public Service Commission to adopt regulations for telephone companies to implement a senior call check-in program for income eligible customers who are at least 65 years old and want to participate in the program. A telephone company would make a call at least once each day at an appointed time to a subscriber. If the subscriber fails to answer the call, a predetermined relative would be contacted by the telephone company. If that person fails to answer, local law enforcement could be contacted to do a welfare check at the subscriber's residence. The service would be free of charge to the subscriber; however, the Public Service Commission (PSC) would be allowed to adjust a "service rate" to insulate the telephone company from any increased expenses as a result of providing the service.

A number of private companies provide similar services for a monthly fee to customers. Additionally, as DLS notes in its Fiscal and Policy Note, several

jurisdictions operate voluntary call check-in services for senior citizens in their areas. The Office of People's Counsel (OPC) understands that this Bill is targeted to assist an older population who may live alone and be medically or otherwise vulnerable, and who may not have the means to subscribe to a paid service or live in an area with a voluntary service. In that respect, the Bill has a laudable goal.

OPC does not know whether call-in services could be provided more efficiently through the telephone company or through volunteer organizations or other organizations, such as the local Departments on Aging. The Bill does permit the telephone company to coordinate with another entity to provide the service. We are not in a position to determine whether local law enforcement agencies are willing or able to make these types of house calls if neither the subscriber nor the relative is responsive to the daily telephone call. The Bill also is not clear as to what follow-up action is expected of local law enforcement if there is no response at the door; this may need further clarification.

The Bill *may* result in increased charges to all residential customers since the PSC is permitted to adjust other rates of local customers to compensate the telephone company for this service. The Fiscal Note does not include an estimate of those costs.

OPC also notes that as drafted the Bill appears to allow only a relative to be named as a contact. It is quite possible that a subscriber may not have a relative in the vicinity who could be named as a contact person. It may be beneficial to broaden the contact person to include a 'person named by the subscriber.'