



Consumer Protections for Cable Bills

If your cable provider charges you, as a subscriber, for services or equipment you did not affirmatively request, you may have experienced “negative option billing.” Similar to “cramming” – the unauthorized placement of charges on telephone bills -- negative option billing burdens customers with the responsibility of contacting a cable company to dispute the charges and obtain refunds.

Cable operators generally are prohibited from charging a subscriber for any service or equipment that the subscriber did not affirmatively request. A cable subscriber must affirmatively request services (e.g., new premium channel subscription) or equipment that constitute a fundamental change in the nature of an existing service or tier of service before a cable operator may charge a subscriber for them. A cable subscriber’s failure to refuse a cable operator’s proposal to provide such service or equipment is not an affirmative request for service or equipment.

FCC action

In a 2016 case of negative option billing, some subscribers of a major cable company claimed that they were billed for service and/or equipment upgrades despite specifically declining them. Others claimed they had no knowledge of the unauthorized charges until they received unordered equipment in the mail, obtained notifications of unrequested account changes by email, or conducted a review of their monthly bills. Consumers described spending significant time and energy to attempt to remove the unauthorized charges from their bills and obtain refunds.

The FCC investigated the company in response to these complaints. The resulting settlement included [a substantial fine and binding commitments](#) by the company that make it easier for the company’s customers to get refunds and harder for unauthorized charges to be placed on the company’s bills.

What you can do

Cable companies have a responsibility to ensure that their bills are accurate and generally that they do not charge their subscribers for any service or equipment that their subscribers have not affirmatively requested. You may [file a complaint](#) with the FCC if you feel that you have been a victim of unlawful billing practices by a cable company.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division



45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Alternate formats

To request this article in an alternate format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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