SB 603-FN, relative to telephone number and area code conservation.

Hearing Date: February 20, 2024

Time Opened: 9:00 a.m. Time Closed: 9:36 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Watters, Pearl, Birdsell and Avard

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Altschiller

Bill Analysis: This bill updates the authority of the department of energy and the public utilities commission to promote and adopt telephone number conservation measures to the maximum extent allowed by federal law for area code 603.

Sponsors:
Sen. Bradley

Who supports the bill: Senator Jeb Bradley (Senate District 3), Rep. Timothy Horrigan, Maura Weston (New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association), Joshua Elliot (NH Department of Energy), Amanda Noonan (NH Department of Energy), Julie Smith, and Daniel Richardson.

Who opposes the bill: None.

Who is neutral on the bill: Chris Rand (NH Telephone Association) and Teresa Rosenberger (Consolidated Communications).

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Jeb Bradley
Senate District 3

- Sen. Bradley introduced SB 603 at the request of the governor to preserve the 603 area code, which holds significance for the state’s identity and branding.
- Sen. Bradley emphasized the importance of the 603 area code to businesses and citizens, expressing concern that its exhaustion could dilute the state's brand.
- Sen. Bradley mentioned the governor's Executive Order 2307, directing the Department of Energy and Bureau of Economic Affairs to explore strategies to prevent the introduction of a new area code.
• Sen. Bradley collaborated with Sen. Avard on an amendment, with a focus on telephone number conservation measures, inspired by Maine's efforts to extend their area code.
• Sen. Bradley deferred to Joshua Elliot from the Department of Energy to provide detailed insights into the bill's specifics.

**Rep. Timothy Horrigan**

• Rep. Horrigan discussed the bill's amendment and expressed a differing viewpoint, considering the possibility of introducing an overlay area code.
• Rep. Horrigan mentioned the governor's executive order emphasizing the iconic status of the 603 area code and the need for conservation efforts.
• Rep. Horrigan supported continuing conservation measures but suggested transitioning to an overlay area code in the future.
• Rep. Horrigan mentioned the transition of jurisdiction over area code policy from the Department of Energy to the Public Utilities Commission.

**Julie Smith**

• Ms. Smith recalled the historical imposition of the 508 area code by New England Telephone, emphasizing cultural distinctions within the region.
• Ms. Smith expressed concern about the potential cultural impact on individuals outside the Concord metropolitan area.
• Ms. Smith clarified that the support for the bill is not rooted in nostalgia but in preserving the identity associated with the 603 area code.

**Maura Weston**

**New England Connectivity and Telecommunications Association**

• Ms. Weston acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of the Department of Energy, sponsors, and the committee in drafting the amendment presented during the session.
• Ms. Weston supported the amendment and commended the collaborative work to preserve the 603 area code.

**Joshua Elliot**

**NH Department of Energy**

  • Sen. Watters inquired about if the amendment will still produce and $100,000 to $300,000 fiscal note and how long the consultant would be needed.
  • Mr. Elliot acknowledged the mention of a consultant, emphasizing a broad range in assessment covering all entities utilizing New Hampshire phone numbers. Mr. Elliot estimated the range, noting it was likely within the ballpark of similar consultations without specifying an exact figure.
Mr. Elliot anticipated the consultancy period to span a couple of years, particularly during the initial phase of implementing changes.

Mr. Elliot suggested that the work might not require a consultant for the entire 10-year period, as the efforts would be front-loaded with ongoing impact.

Mr. Elliot clarified the need for cost consideration, highlighting an estimated range of $100,000 to $300,000. Mr. Elliot emphasized that costs might be more intensive initially and could taper off as the changes take effect over the extended period.

**Amanda Noonan**

**NH Department of Energy**

- Ms. Noonan addressed the passion and concerns expressed by residents about changes in area codes and losing the 603 code.
- Ms. Noonan highlighted New Hampshire's unique status as one of the few states with a single area code since its establishment in 1947.
- Ms. Noonan noted past success in delaying the exhaust of the 603 area code in 2000 and 2011.
- Ms. Noonan stated the need for new measures and conservation strategies to extend the life of the 603 area code, referencing Sen. Bradley's mention of Maine's success in extending their area code exhaust date to 2034.
- Ms. Noonan emphasized the finite nature of phone numbers and the eventual need for new area codes for everyone.
- Ms. Noonan explained the key provisions of the legislation, extending the Department of Energy's authority for number conservation to all carriers using numbers in New Hampshire, including wireless and interconnected carriers.
- Ms. Noonan clarified that the legislation focuses on how carriers use assigned telephone numbers without regulating rates or business practices.
- Ms. Noonan mentioned the provision allowing the department to assess investigation costs to all entities using numbering resources for fair distribution.
- Ms. Noonan reiterated that there would be no geographic split, and once the state adopts 10-digit dialing, any new area code would be implemented as an overlay in New Hampshire.
  - Sen. Birdsell inquired about the measures taken by Maine to extend the life of their area code.
- Ms. Noonan highlighted that Maine initiated the process of ordering all service providers to return non-contaminated blocks of numbers to the numbering pool, which the NH Department of Energy recently did.
- Ms. Noonan highlighted the role of the North American Numbering Plan Administrator's pooling administrator, managing the assignments of numbering resources, allowing blocks of a thousand numbers to be returned for use by another provider.
- Ms. Noonan discussed Maine's approach to forecasting, where carriers predict future number needs based on economic circumstances and marketing campaigns.
Ms. Noonan shared that Maine took a thorough look at carriers' forecasts, enabling them to conserve numbers proactively before actual deployment.

Ms. Noonan emphasized the importance of strategic planning to avoid premature exhaustion of numbering resources.

Ms. Noonan noted that Maine is partway down the road to rate center consolidation, citing an ongoing investigation with Consolidated Communications and its implications for more rural carriers.

Ms. Noonan underlined the significance of ensuring that the specific needs of rural carriers are met, given the challenges they face.

Ms. Noonan pointed out that resource-draining areas include Manchester, Portsmouth, Concord, Nashua, and Keene. Ms. Noonan clarified that these areas are distinct from regions where rural telephone companies primarily operate.

Ms. Noonan stressed the importance of close collaboration with providers in those areas to address their unique needs and concerns effectively.

**Summary of testimony presented in opposition:** None.

**Neutral Information Presented:**

**Chris Rand**  
**NH Telephone Association**

- Mr. Rand, formerly the Vice President of Granite State Communications and representative of the New Hampshire Telephone Association, provided comments based on the version of the bill before seeing the amendment.
- Mr. Rand expressed a lack of familiarity with the amendment but emphasized the importance of ensuring that rural carriers retained their FCC designation as rural primary carriers.
- Mr. Rand highlighted the concern about the removal of references to NPA NXX (blocks of 10,000 numbers) in the proposed law, noting potential unintended consequences in the future.
- Mr. Rand stressed that rural carriers historically had not been a significant source of numbering problems due to their limited number blocks.
- Mr. Rand raised challenges for rural carriers in transitioning to 10,000 block pooling, citing minimal rewards in blocks returned to the pool and technological constraints for some members.
- Mr. Rand pointed out that rate center consolidation was not feasible for rural carriers serving non-contiguous areas.
- Mr. Rand clarified that while not opposed to the bill, they proposed either reintroducing the reference to thousands block pooling or incorporating language distinguishing NPA and carriers from thousands block pooling carriers.
Teresa Rosenberger  
Consolidated Communications

- Ms. Rosenberger conveyed a neutral stance on the bill and assumed a similar position on the amendment, having not fully read it.
- Ms. Rosenberger acknowledged a collaborative effort in working towards a resolution within the domain.
- Ms. Rosenberger stated that she was in agreement with the amendment, emphasizing the importance of preserving the 603 area code.
- Ms. Rosenberger pledged ongoing collaboration with stakeholders and expressed hope for the resolution of issues raised by the New Hampshire Telephone Association.

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Date Hearing Report completed: February 22, 2024