

## Protecting Our Customers' Privacy Online

Recent action in Washington to repeal rules proposed by the FCC last year regarding the protection of consumers' information online has caused some concern that personal information from Cooperative Telephone Exchange customers will now be shared or sold. These concerns are understandable, but unfounded.

The truth is our customers are no less protected now than they were before. None of the FCC's rules were in place when Congress voted to stop them. Rather, Congress stopped the rules from taking effect, in large part to address regulatory imbalance and customer confusion that the FCC measures would have created. In particular, the FCC's new, expanded regulations for broadband providers would not have governed applications like Google, Facebook, and Amazon that have access to as much, if not more, consumer information. By taking its steps, Congress has put us on a path to have customers protected by a strong, uniform set of broadband privacy standards no matter who holds their data.

So, in the interim, what protections are in place right now?

Nearly two years ago, the FCC issued an advisory to telecommunications providers like Cooperative Telephone Exchange directing them to abide by "core customer privacy protections." This guidance remains in effect today and was not affected by the repeal of so-called privacy rules.

In addition, Cooperative Telephone Exchange and other broadband providers have committed to a set of voluntary, comprehensive privacy principles. These include: 1) **Transparency**, providing customers with clear, comprehensible, accurate and continuously available information; 2) **Consumer choice**, offering customers the choice to decide how sensitive information might be used; 3) **Data security**, following federal and industry guidelines to protect user information; and 4) **Data breach notifications**, to notify customers, law enforcement, regulators and other parties right away about potentially harmful breaches.

It is important to us that our customers know that recent action by our government did not reduce or eliminate measures in place to protect the privacy of customer information. Cooperative Telephone Exchange is working with our industry partners to ensure best practices are created to ensure the protection of consumer data, and as a local company with a strong commitment to our communities, we have a vested interest in seeing that those protections are followed.