

Consumer Protections for Cable Bills

If your cable provider charges you for services or equipment you did not request or agree to, you may have experienced “negative option billing.” Similar to “cramming” -- when unauthorized charges are placed on a customer’s phone bill by a telephone company -- negative option billing burdens customers with the responsibility of contacting a cable company to dispute the charges and obtain refunds.

Cable providers are prohibited from charging subscribers for services or equipment they did not request. You must agree to things such as premium channel subscriptions, set-top boxes or digital video recorders before your cable company can charge you for them. It is not enough for a cable company to just let you opt-out after adding a new service or piece of equipment to your bill.

FCC action

In a 2016 case of negative option billing, subscribers of a major cable company claimed that they were billed for service and 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 customers to get refunds and harder for unauthorized charges to be placed on bills.

What you can do

Cable companies have a responsibility to ensure that their bills are accurate and that their customers have authorized any and all charges. You may [file a complaint](#) with the FCC if you feel that you have been a victim of unlawful billing practices.

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
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Alternate formats

To request this article in an accessible 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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