

Telecommunications Consumer Rights

TRA Business Users Advisory Group (BAG) forms sub-group for consumer rights (CRG)

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Numerous marketing advertisements, unclear calling costs, and overseas calling charges changing without notice, high mobile phone bills, confusing telephone rates and charges, poor customer services and late home repair appointments: The frustrating list of telephone consumers' complaints keeps on getting bigger.

In the rapidly changing telephone industry, consumers feel lost in the shuffle of big business. Advocacy and consumer information is not readily available, but TRA's Business User Advisory Group (BAG) sub-committee; Consumer Rights Group (CRG), is focusing on reviewing consumer rights and actions to tackle some of these issues.

BAG/CRG is pushing for a Telecommunications Consumer Bill of Rights, which is part of a one-year education and advocacy program for telecommunications now getting underway. BAG/CRG is working in collaboration with TRA and a national consortium of consumer groups to provide training and advocacy around telecommunication issues.

The draft proposed "**Consumer Bill of Rights Document**" include:

1. **Right of Disclosure:** Consumers have the right to receive clear and complete terms and conditions for service agreements and disclosures of prices for goods and services, and to affirmatively accept all terms and conditions before being charged for services. Consumers have the right to know their rights.
2. **Right of Choice:** Consumers have the right to select their Service Providers, and to have the choice respected by industry.
3. **Right of Privacy:** Consumers have the right to personal privacy, to protection from unauthorized use of their records and personal information, and to reject intrusive communications and technology.
4. **Right of Accurate, Clearly Worded and Organized Bills:** Consumers have the right to be accurately billed for services they authorize. Telecommunications Service Providers shall provide clearly worded and organized bills.
5. **Right of Timely Redress:** Consumers have the right to dispute charges or services. Telecommunications Service Providers services shall provide clear information on customer bills explaining how and where consumers can

complain. Consumers shall have their complaints addressed in a timely manner and without harassment.

6. **Right of Timely Installation, Restoration and Repair Service:** Consumers have the right to timely installation of new services, and restoration and repair of existing services. Consumers have the right to an order confirmation number.
7. **Right of Priority Restoration for Registered Medical or Life-Threatening Conditions:** Consumers have the right to priority restoration of restricted basic service for medical or life-threatening conditions. Consumers must notify their vendor that such a condition exists and request placement on a priority list. Priority restoration does not negate consumers' responsibility to pay for services but does allow for a minimum payment plan.
8. **Right of Timely and Responsive Customer Service:** Consumers have the right to timely customer service from knowledgeable employees. Consumers have the right to be treated with courtesy and respect. Consumers have the right to speak to a Vendor supervisor if dissatisfied with customer service, and to be informed of this right during the initial complaint process. Consumers have the right to file a complaint with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) if the problem is not resolved after speaking with a supervisor, and to be informed of this right during the initial complaint process.
9. **Right of Quality Service:** Consumers have the right to quality service. Local telephone companies must provide and list in their directory a 24-hour repair service number. Consumers have the right to access Service Providers' annual quality of service reports.
10. **Right of Compensation:** Consumers have the right to be compensated if the service provider incorrectly cuts off the service or the service fails for longer than a given period.
11. **Right of Basic Local Service:** Consumers have the right to affordable basic local service. Local telephone Service Providers cannot deny service based on race, gender, marital status, income, or service location. Service Providers must inform customers of low-income telephone assistance programs and offer payment plans.
12. **Right to a Second Chance:** Consumers have the right to a second chance. Service Providers cannot deny service or disconnect local basic service except for: nonpayment of local service charges; failure to meet a deferred payment plan; interference with the service of others; continued operation of nonstandard equipment after notification; failure to pay a deposit; or falsification of application information.
13. **Right of Public Participation:** Consumers have the right to participate in public policy proceedings and shall be informed of the means to participate.
14. **Right of Oversight and Enforcement:** Consumers have the right to be informed of their rights and what agency enforces those rights. Consumers

have the right to address how well the government and other regulators monitor and implement consumer protections on their behalf.

15. **Right to a Fair Complaint Process:** Consumers have the right to a fair complaint process. Consumers must have accessible knowledge of the complaint process and steps needed to lodge a complaint. Consumers have the right to a customer-oriented response for complaints within 48 hours.
16. **Right to Reasonable Accommodations:** Consumers with disabilities have a right to any reasonable accommodations needed to understand consumer rights. Consumers with disabilities must have information to access disability-related equipment, services or information needed for utilization of telecommunications devices and services.

BAG/CRG is interested in hearing what consumers in Bahrain have to say about telecommunications! If you wish to discuss any issues regarding telecommunications service providers, internet service providers, telecommunications assistive technology, mobile phones, or any other telecommunications issue, do let us know!

Contact: bag@tra.org.bh

About Business Advisory Group

Due to the different needs and concerns of business users as compared to individual consumers, TRA has decided to establish a separate group for the business sector. Feedback from the business sector is especially important in this phase of market development, as business customers are starting to have, in some areas, more choice in terms of service provider, prices and quality of service. The Business Advisory Group will be independent from TRA, and while TRA may offer its support on request, it will not be involved in the recommendations made by the group.