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New Area Code in Eastern Upstate New York Announced

— Telephone, Cell Phone Customers To Use 838 Area Code Starting in 3rd Quarter 2017 —

ALBANY — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today announced that a new area code number has been assigned for eastern upstate New York. The new 838 area code will provide additional much-needed phone numbers for residents and businesses in the existing 518 area code region. The new area code will be activated by the third quarter of 2017.

“We needed to create a new area code because of strong and robust demand for telecommunication services,” said Commission Chair Audrey Zibelman. “With the creation of the new 838 area code, eastern New York is well-positioned to accommodate future growth in this important sector of the economy, and it will ensure that local telephone service remains efficient.”

In May, the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA) informed the Commission that the 518 area code was projected to run out of available telephone numbers by the first quarter of 2019. However, last month NANPA updated the projected exhaust forecast and advised the Commission that the area code is projected to run out as early as third quarter 2017 due to unprecedented demand for telephone numbers in the 518 region. As a result, the implementation timeline for the new area code will be shorter than those in previous area code relief cases.

To provide area code relief as required by federal law, the Commission examined “overlay” and “geographic split” options, and determined that an overlay code was the best option. An overlay code is easier to implement, less expensive, easier for customers to adapt to, and fairer to all customers. A solid majority of the public comments in the proceeding favored an overlay. With the addition of the 838 code, there are now 19 area codes in New York State. NANPA estimates the life of the new area code to be approximately 49 years, or through 2065.

Next Steps:

The implementation schedule of the approved overlay will consist of a network preparation period, a permissive dialing period that allows both 7-digit and 10-digit (area code plus 7-digit number) dialing to work, and then a mandatory dialing period when 10-digit dialing will be required (any misdialed calls will not be connected and will trigger a message directing the caller to dial 10 digits).

Key implementation dates will be determined by Commission staff working with incumbent local wireline carriers, competitive local exchange carriers, cellular carriers, and broadband carriers within the next 45 days, taking into consideration the newly updated third quarter of 2017 exhaust forecast.

The new area code will be overlaid on the existing 518 calling area, which will result in mandatory 10-digit dialing since two area codes will serve the same calling area. Regions served by multiple areas codes must employ 10-digit dialing as required by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandate. It is important to note that all existing telephone users in the region will retain their current phone numbers, including the 518 area code.

Once the new code is activated, sometime before the end of the third of quarter of 2017, new telephone numbers could be assigned to either the 518 or the new 838 area code, depending on when the 518 numbers run out in each of the 140 rate centers, or geographic areas that determine the boundaries for local calling, billing and assigning phone numbers, in the 518 area code region. For instance, less populous rate centers could find 518 numbers lasting longer than in larger, more populated rate centers. All portions of the 518 area will be subject to the milestones' due dates as a means to mitigate the expense and inconvenience of the conversion process to consumers and providers.

Throughout the implementation, the Commission will be conducting outreach to the public to ensure that customers are aware of the area code change and its implementation milestones. The geographic area associated with the new 838 area code is located in all or part of 17 counties: Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saint Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren and Washington.

The relevant order in this proceeding may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at www.dps.ny.gov and entering Case Number 16-C-0297 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission documents may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.