

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY JUNE 17, 1999

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 10, 1999

AMENDED IN SENATE APRIL 20, 1999

AMENDED IN SENATE APRIL 7, 1999

SENATE BILL

No. 531

Introduced by Senator Baca

February 19, 1999

An act to add Section 311.4 to the Public Utilities Code, relating to public utilities.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 531, as amended, Baca. Public Utilities Commission: complaints.

The Public Utilities Act requires the Public Utilities Commission, on and after July 1, 1999, to publish specified information on its Internet site, including, but not limited to, decisions and resolutions, general orders, the Rules of Practice and Procedure of the commission, rulings in proceedings, and a docket card for each proceeding listing documents in the case.

This bill would require the commission, on or before July 1, 2000, to establish procedures to permit the submission of informal complaints through electronic means, as defined, in accordance with prescribed provisions. The bill would make related legislative findings and declarations and a statement of legislative intent.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares
2 all of the following:
3 (1) The Legislature has encouraged state agencies to
4 make information available to the public through various
5 means, including the Internet.
6 (2) The Internet has permitted increased
7 communication between the people of this state and state
8 agencies, educating the people of this state on the role
9 and function of each agency.
10 (3) The Internet website maintained by the Public
11 Utilities Commission provides the people of this state
12 with information regarding the commission and the
13 markets and services that the commission regulates. The
14 website also provides a way for members of the public to
15 communicate with the commission.
16 (4) Currently, the Public Utilities Commission website
17 accepts *informal* complaints.
18 (5) Customers for services regulated by the Public
19 Utilities Commission and the companies offering those
20 services are entitled to an efficient dispute resolution
21 process.
22 (6) The Internet is an ideal means for resolving
23 disputes between customers and service providers in an
24 efficient manner, regardless of the geographic location of
25 the customer.
26 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature to enhance the
27 role of the Public Utilities Commission by allowing
28 customers and service providers the option to resolve
29 disputes through electronic communications to provide
30 a greater level of efficiency for the parties involved and
31 to make the Public Utilities Commission dispute
32 resolution process accessible to all people of this state.
33 SEC. 2. Section 311.4 is added to the Public Utilities
34 Code, to read:



1 311.4. (a) On or before July 1, 2000, the commission
2 shall establish procedures to permit the submission of
3 informal complaints through electronic means in
4 accordance with this section.

5 (b) On or before January 1, 2001, the commission shall
6 provide on its Internet website the means by which
7 consumers may submit informal complaints through
8 electronic means.

9 (c) It is the intent of the Legislature that, commencing
10 one year from the date that the procedures described in
11 subdivision (a) are implemented, the commission
12 annually review the procedures and the technology
13 involved to ensure the continued effectiveness of the
14 program, and report any findings to the Legislature.

15 (d) For the purpose of this section, “electronic means”
16 includes, but shall not be limited to, e-mail or the
17 Internet, or both.

18 (e) Upon the receipt of an informal complaint
19 submitted by electronic means, the commission shall
20 immediately forward the complaint to the entity named
21 in the complaint.

22 (f) The commission shall permit the ~~filing~~ *submission*
23 of informal complaints through electronic means, if, as
24 determined by the commission, both of the following
25 conditions are met:

26 (1) The dollar amount in the complaint does not
27 exceed the jurisdictional limit of a small claims court
28 specified in subdivision (a) of Section 116.220 of the Code
29 of Civil Procedure.

30 (2) The commission has addressed any impediments
31 in the electronic systems employed by the commission
32 that would prevent or substantially adversely affect the
33 ability of the commission to receive informal complaints
34 by electronic means.

35 (g) The commission shall include a notice on its
36 Internet website of the availability of the procedures
37 described in subdivision (a).

38 (h) For the purposes of implementing this section, the
39 commission shall make available to the public an industry
40 specific online complaint form that allows ~~the—customers~~

1 *a customer* to specify information that the commission
2 determines to be relevant for purposes of resolving a
3 dispute, including the account number, the type of
4 dispute, and the opportunity to make general comments.

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