Local Telephone Service
My phone bill is so confusing. How can I read it? Although the phone bills of different companies are not identical, they all have the following parts:

1. A separate page, section, or card to return when paying your bill by mail.

2. A page or section listing monthly local charges, including:
   • a basic line charge for access to the local and long-distance networks;
   • the monthly interstate access or supplemental line charge;
   • federal, state, city, and local taxes.

   In the section listing local charges, charges will also be listed for optional or special services, including:
   • the charge for local calls if you are billed using measured service;
   • charges for optional local services such as tone phone service and call waiting;
   • a monthly rental fee if you are renting your phone from the local phone company;
   • a monthly service charge for a maintenance agreement or service contract you may have with the local phone company for your telephone or inside wiring.

3. A page or section listing charges for long-distance calls within your Market Service Area (MSA). Illinois is divided into 19 geographical regions or MSAs. Long-distance service within your MSA is provided by your local company. Check the front section of your telephone directory to learn which MSA you are in.

4. A page or section listing charges for long-distance calls outside your MSA (if the local phone company bills for the long-distance service you use).

If you have any questions about your local phone bill, call your phone company. The number is usually listed on the bill.
What is the "interstate access" or "supplemental line" charge on my phone bill? That is a charge that all telephone customers pay. When AT&T broke up its monopoly in 1984, the court ordered that all consumers pay this charge. It is to help the local phone companies make up long-distance service revenues that were lost with the breakup of AT&T. The charge started at $1 a month, has increased to over $2 a month, and will increase in the future.

What is flat-rate billing? Flat-rate billing means that you are charged a fixed amount each month for basic local service. The charge is the same each month regardless of how many local calls you make.

What is measured service or usage-sensitive service? With this system you also pay a fixed monthly charge for basic local service. However, the charge is lower than it is with flat-rate billing. In addition to the fixed charge, you also pay for each local call you make. The charge for each call usually depends on when you call and where you call; sometimes the rate also depends on how long you talk. Measured service is the only choice in some exchanges; in others, it is optional.

What if I cannot pay my phone bill on time? If you are unable to pay on time, call the phone number listed on the bill and explain the problem. Unless you pay the bill or make other arrangements with the company, you will receive a Notice of Disconnection. This notice shows the date your phone service will stop if the bill is not paid. If you pay the bill late, most companies charge an extra amount. If you do not pay the bill and your phone is disconnected, you will have to pay the bill plus interest to reconnect your phone service. You may also have to pay an extra charge to have service reconnected. However, you are allowed one free reconnection each year.
Am I charged for directory assistance?
Yes. However, some companies let you make one or two calls per month without a charge. You can save money by checking to be sure the number is not listed in the phone book before calling directory assistance. Be sure you have the full name and correct spelling of the person whose number you want. You will be charged for calling directory assistance even if you are not given a phone number. During one call to directory assistance, you can ask for a second number at no extra charge. Put the number you are given in a place where you can find it the next time. If you need a number for someone who has recently moved, call the old number. A new number reference is usually provided. If you frequently call areas outside your local exchange, ask your local phone company for directories to those areas. You are entitled to directories for other areas at no charge.

There are so many local services available. Do I need them? That is an individual choice. Some of the services that may be available from your local phone company include:

- **Tone calling** — needed to use some long-distance services, to bank by phone, and to use a tone phone;
- **Call waiting** — lets you know (with a beep tone) when someone else is calling while you are using the phone;
- **Call forwarding** — lets you transfer calls to another number when you are not at home;
- **Speed calling** — lets you call numbers that you use most often by dialing only one or two numbers.

Each of these services costs from less than $1 to $3 or more a month. If you have any of these services, you must pay the charges whether or not you use the service in a given month.
How can I decide what combination of local phone services costs the least? The Illinois Universal Telephone Service Protection Law of 1985 requires that if your local phone company offers a choice of services, it must send you a notice each year. The notice lets you know that you are entitled to receive a free annual report describing which local service options would result in the lowest billing. The report is based on your calling pattern and usage for the past six months. For more information, contact your local phone company.