

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001 (202) 626-5100

March 31, 1992

Letter to the Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Editor:

I applaud the Post [Metro, March 29] for bringing to the public's attention some potentially troubling aspects of the D.C. Public Service Commission's (PSC) policy of removing pay telephones in areas of heavy drug trafficking. As the article noted, these phones could be urgently needed in times of emergency.

Often we at the PSC will see a dozen or more phones in use in areas where illegal drug sales are transacted. Not only are the phones used to facilitate illegal business, but the crowds of drug traffickers also stifle legitimate commercial businesses and cause neighborhood decline.

In response to the public need, the PSC will first convert a pay telephone to outgoing calls only. If that action does not satisfy the affected community, the problem pay telephone is removed. However, when we do so, it is our policy always to leave at least one pay telephone per block. In fact, we require that, when we order removal, another pay telephone must be in the line of vision from the site of the removed pay telephone.

Of course, the PSC cannot order pay telephones to be placed in all locations. We have no authority to control the free market forces in this respect.

The Post article noted that an area of Congress Heights contained no pay telephones. The article related the difficulty of a low-income grandmother and mother in a "panicky state," frantically running up and down the street in search of a pay telephone in order to get help for a baby who had fallen victim to a "fever seizure." This story should have elicited compassion and concern from all readers.

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The reporter may have assumed that the PSC removed pay telephones from that area. However, we checked our records and found that the PSC, since its inception in 1913, has never ordered the removal of a pay telephone from Congress Heights.

Sincerely,


Howard C. Davenport
Chairman,
Public Service Commission
of the District of Columbia