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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

9 September 2005

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

ecita.sen@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the Telstra (Transition to Full Private ownership) Bill 2005 and related bills

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national disability rights and advocacy organisation. We have a cross-disability focus; we represent the interests of people with all forms of disability. PWD is a non-profit, non-government organisation.

We are writing to express our concern at some of the possible implications for our clients with the proposed sale of Telstra.

PWD provide advocacy to a large range of individuals. Many of our clients have multiple disadvantages, including homelessness. Others reside in accommodation where they experience physical, emotional and other abuse. It is often difficult for our clients to seek outside assistance.

We are concerned at suggestions to increase the cost of a public phone call to fifty cents. For many of our clients this would provide a substantial disadvantage as they have little or no disposable income. Our clients who are residents of some establishments are required to pay 85% of their income for food and lodging and are often required to pay extra for incidentals such as heating, coffee, tea and washing of clothes. While an extra ten cents would not be a disadvantage to most of society for some of our clients it would be immense. We would urge that Telstra be required to ensure that the cost of public phone calls not be increased.

PWD is also concerned at what appears to be a program to remove public phones. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that 'uneconomic' public phones are being removed. We are concerned that a fully privatised Telstra would accelerate this policy. Many of our clients require access to public phones as a means of reporting abuse and neglect, as it is only when they are away from their residences that they feel safe to take action. Removal of public phones further isolates these people from possible community support. We believe that there should be a requirement of Telstra to maintain the number of public phones to ensure that people unable to afford mobile technology have some access to telecommunications.

Further, PWD is concerned to ensure that no measures are taken that would disrupt or alter the Telstra *Universal Service Obligation*. Many of the commitments contained in this policy ensure that people with disability have access to telecommunications that otherwise would not be available to them.

There are many other issues that PWD would welcome the opportunity to raise with the Committee. However, the short time frame for response has precluded this.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or would like to discuss any aspects of our submission.

Yours sincerely

ALANNA CLOHESY
Deputy Director, Advocacy