

Ed Richards
Chief Executive
Ofcom
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 9HA

8th July 2009

Dear Mr Richards,

I write to tell you that my organisation, Carers UK, has become a partner of the campaign, called Terminate the Rate, set up by BT and 3 Mobile to reduce the cost of calls to mobile phones. We ask you to amend the regulations to make calls cheaper for carers and stop them from sliding further into poverty.

We joined the campaign as part of our wider work to try to reduce the poverty and hardship faced by many carers looking after their disabled, ill or frail relatives. Carers provide this support unpaid, and often at a cost to themselves. There are currently six million carers throughout the UK – outnumber the health and social care workforce two to one.

Carers UK know from our contact with carers, through our advice helpline and research that once people take on caring for a disabled or ill relative, unpaid, they often find that the costs of caring rocket, whilst their income plummets. Figures from last year's research, Carers in Crisis, show that 77% of people who have become carers are financially worse off as a result. We found the recession biting hard into their meagre incomes and savings. We found that 74% were struggling to pay basic bills, including telephone bills which many mentioned – both mobile and landline. As a result of the high costs of care, 52% of carers were cutting back on food to make ends meet and 54% were in debt not knowing what to do next.

Carers are also likely to have higher phone bills because the calls that they make are an essential part of managing care. They are unavoidable and cannot simply be cut back when financial times get tough. Cutting back on telephone calls could put the person they care for at risk as well as reduce the quality of support that they receive. Carers make calls to check on the person for whom they care, they also spend a great deal of time making calls to arrange care, including phoning doctors, social workers, housing departments, pharmacies, benefits agencies, other parts of public services, local transport, etc. and also because they may not be able to leave the house, they have to make a great deal of phone calls.

Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner

We believe that because Mobile Termination Rates are set so high, at many times what it actually costs, carers are hit hard because they cannot cut down on these calls to make ends meet because they are so essential. We urgently need a change in regulations, which brings down the costs of calls through setting future MTRs at what it costs, to improve carer's incomes and to stop them from sliding further into poverty.

Carers UK fully support this campaign and hope that Ofcom will make the changes necessary to help improve carers' lives by listening to our comments.

I have enclosed a copy of examples of how high telephone bills cause stress, worry and anxiety amongst carers. We have many more which we can provide to illustrate the issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Imelda Redmond". The script is cursive and fluid.

Imelda Redmond
Chief Executive