

## Protecting Community Television Act To Be Reintroduced

by Dave Garb, Legislative Committee Chair

We have all been waiting for a long time to see the Protecting Community Television Act be moved on by our federal lawmakers. During the 117th Congress, these bills had many co-sponsors, 2 of which included New Jersey's own Representatives Donald Payne, Jr. and Bonnie Watson Coleman. Unfortunately, it was never voted on and was left to be hopefully brought up in the new Congress.

Well, that day has "literally" just arrived. The bills are going to be reintroduced by Senators Edward Markey and Tammy Baldwin, and Representative Anna Eshoo.

To remind you of what these Identical bills would accomplish for community television, they would reverse the regulations made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and ensure that public, educational, and government (PEG) channels have the assets they need to keep producing content for their viewers.

The following is from a press release from Senator Edward Markey on the importance of this legislation. It included comments from not only its main sponsors, but from our national partners - the ACM and NATOA as well.

- "In 2019, the FCC allowed cable companies to put a price tag on in-kind contributions they provide to communities, including PEG channels. Under the rule, cable companies can then subtract the ascribed value from the franchising fees that they pay in order to operate. The FCC's decision has forced local governments across the country to decide between supporting PEG programming and supporting other public services for schools, public safety buildings, and libraries in cable franchise agreements."
- "I am proud to reintroduce my Protecting Community Television Act, which will undo Trump-era rulemaking undermining community television, a service which millions of Americans rely on to keep up with the news that matters most to them, stay plugged into enriching, educational programming, and hold their local governments to account," said Senator Markey. "At a time when news and media have become more consolidated than ever before, we must work to uphold local access to public, education, and government channels for every household in our country."
- "Community television is a critical part of our society, giving a voice to nonprofits, artists, local governments, and other community members who otherwise struggle to be heard," said Representative Eshoo. "The Trump FCC's actions on cable franchise fees have hurt public, educational, and governmental television, and this harms communities. I'm proud to reintroduce the Protecting Community Television Act with Senators Markey and Baldwin, legislation that reverse these harmful agency actions and protect community television by ensuring local voices have the platform they deserve."
- "Countless households across Wisconsin rely on community television to provide them with their local news and to lift up the voices of local businesses, organizations, and people," said Senator Baldwin. "I am proud to once again support the Protecting Community Television Act to ensure folks across the country can continue to access the news sources they know and trust."

The Protecting Community Television Act is endorsed by Alliance for Community Media, National Association of Counties, National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, National League of Cities, and MassAccess.

- "Local communities need the vital civic information that community television provides - to support local culture, education, business growth, government transparency and access to local democracy. We

welcome reintroduction of the Act which reinforces the idea that communities deserve community channels, and the Federal government shouldn't set up disincentives for meeting local information needs," said Mike Wassenaar, President and CEO of The Alliance for Community Media.

- "The PCTA is elegant legislation that seeks to protect benefits consistent with the Cable Act and cable franchising principles since 1984. In 2019, the Federal Communications Commission issued an order that undermines this ability by redefining the term "franchise fees" as used in the Cable Act, and substituting its definition for that written by Congress in 1984. The Protecting Community Television Act remedies that altered meaning by protecting local public, educational and community access television so folks in communities across the country can continue to access relevant and timely local news that they rely on. The PCTA reaffirms Congress' original intent to protect the long-standing ability of local governments to manage public property and provide for local media through public, educational and governmental access channels (PEG Access) in cable franchise agreements," said Mike Lynch, Legislative Director for National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors.
- "Local PEG channels help cities, towns and villages to provide critical information and services to residents. The National League of Cities applauds the introduction of the Protecting Community Television Act, which would ensure that resources traditionally negotiated in cable franchises are preserved for the future," said Clarence Anthony, CEO and Executive Director of the National League of Cities.
- "It's reaffirming to witness the efforts legislators who recognize community media as both relevant and worthy of protection," said David Gauthier, President of Massachusetts Community Media, Inc. "Too often in a world of rapidly-evolving technology, community media is viewed as a relic of the past, whereas the truth is that our services are more in demand than ever. The continuing loss of local print media has left a void that community television makes every attempt to fill. The challenge, however, is that that funding for our efforts continues to head in the wrong direction. Funding for community media is directly tied to cable subscriptions, which decrease year after year. Subscriptions to cable services in Massachusetts have gone down over 20% since 2015 and that translates to less funding for community media operations. The Protecting Community Television Act would help to clarify financial responsibilities that cable companies must adhere to and undo industry-friendly measures taken by the FCC in the past."

Once these bills are reintroduced, it will fall on all of us in New Jersey to do our part to see that all of our Congressional members are ready again to support them and lead the way in making sure that every municipality's voice can continue to be heard by their specific audiences. No matter how big, or how small.

**JAG (Jersey Access Group) is an organization that advocates, promotes, and preserves the right to media production, distribution, civic engagement, and education in support of diverse community voices, through Public, Educational and Government access facilities and other forms of media.**

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