

Community Media's Future

By the Alliance for Community Media

For democracy to flourish, people must be educated to think critically and become active participants in their government. Communications networks which use the public rights-of-way and public spectrum must provide the means and support for that participation through local community uses of media.

Public, educational, and government (PEG) access channels and centers have been part of the regulatory framework for cable television since 1972, playing a key role in providing a diversity of viewpoints and ideas at the local level. There are over 3000 public access centers, also called PEG or Community Media Centers, around the country that provide people with tools, training and transmission of their programming on cable channels.

Take a walk down Mainstreet America today. In many towns you'll find that the **only local television channel is a PEG channel**. It's the go-to place for emergency alerts, community festivals, health education, school closing information and local election debates. Research says that only ½ of 1% of programming on commercial media is devoted to local public affairs.

In the last few years, the FCC's Video Franchising orders have severely weakened the PEG access regulatory framework. Unless there are legislative and regulatory changes at the federal level, PEG Access **is at risk of being damaged and dismantled beyond recovery in many states**. If this happens an important local outlet for free speech and democracy will be silenced forever.

Therefore, the Alliance and its members urge the FCC to:

1. Reconsider and reverse FCC Video Franchising orders (MB05-311).
2. Enforce, with meaningful sanctions, the provisions of the Cable Act of 1984, that relate to PEG access, specifically that:
 - PEG channels must be treated as an equivalent, in signal quality and functionality, to local broadcast channels.
 - PEG channels must be available on the lowest cost, most accessible tier of service.
3. Collect and make available meaningful data about PEG access, including the impact of the changing franchising landscape.
4. Reform and streamline the FCC's complaint/response process so that under-resourced public organizations and the general public are treated fairly.
5. Urge Congress to strengthen the 1984 Cable Act so that community media is strong and protected and able to take advantage of 21st century tools.

The Alliance for Community Media (the Alliance), the national non-profit association representing PEG access channels and centers across the United States, is dedicated to advancing democratic ideals by ensuring that all people have access to media resources in their local communities.