

Date: March 7, 2008

To: Energy and Technology Committee

**Subject: H.B. 5814, AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY ACCESS TELEVISION.**

From: Coralee Reiss

I support H.B. 5814. Nearly 19,000 stakeholders in Fairfield fund the public television access system and own the system, yet have no voice in how their dollars are used. Community access television in Area 2 (Bridgeport, Fairfield, Milford, Orange, Stratford and Woodbridge) is the property of the stakeholder (us), is funded by the stakeholder, and its purpose is to provide local content primarily in the areas of local government and education.

Public access is supposed to provide town-specific programming for each municipality. Fairfield citizens should have access to Fairfield programs that are determined by the people of Fairfield. We should be able to watch our own Board of Education deliberate redistricting, or the Police Department make the case for their share of the town budget, or high school football games, and Spectrum Concerts.

But instead, there are lots of religious ministry shows, the Pentagon Channel, Our CT Guard, assorted operas and orchestras, and tapes of meetings from Stratford and Woodbridge -- but not Fairfield. All worthy in some other context, but extraneous and irrelevant to our public access; contributing nothing to good government *or spurring civic involvement in our local community.*

Cablevision, approved by the Department of Public Utility Control to run our cable franchise, chose Mr. Castelot to head Sound View Community Media to oversee community access. Sound View has the capability to provide town specific community access, but Mr. Castelot refuses because he prefers regional access *over the many objections of the towns and local producers.*

Sound View Community Media blames the towns for not supplying content, but according to Cable Advisory Council's Gery Speno, Sound View provides no funding to the towns. They also insist on deciding what time and how often programs can air. Mr. Castelot has developed a highly unusual regional philosophy (unlike most other public access channels), which allows Castelot to centralize the funding from stakeholders and not share it with the six towns. According to Speno, *Sound View is mandated by the DPUC to supply and split up monies among the six towns through a one-time payout of \$60,000. To the best of my knowledge, he has yet dispersed these monies completely, despite a mandate to do so from the DPUC.*

In the next 11 years, Sound View will receive nearly \$6,715,000 from subscriber and stakeholder funds. This is in addition to nearly \$1,000,000 it maintains in reserve bank accounts from the same resource. *The 6 towns and the Cable Advisory Council have failed, after many repeated attempts and complaints, to overcome the obstacles that have been put in place by Mr. Castelot and Sound View media.*

I wholeheartedly support House Bill 5814. It will mandate the change needed to make public access public. The whole point of community access is to build interest and participation in open government, and our public schools. We're paying for it, and we're entitled to it.

Thank you.

Coralee Reiss  
154 Wareham Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
203-254-2765