

Date: March 7, 2008
To: Energy and Technology Committee
Subject: H.B. 5814, AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY ACCESS TELEVISION.
From: Jody Eisemann

I write in support H.B. #5814. As a former television producer and network news editor, when I moved to Fairfield I wanted to be involved in local public access TV. Around 1999, I took Soundview Media's mandated editing training for the public. I had 15 years of experience as a video editor and was completely appalled by the poor quality training that was being offered to the general public (i.e. Soundview's paid trainer told me she was unfamiliar with the standard "L-cut" edit and did all editing in "assemble" mode, essentially tagging footage end to end, which is not editing and would make for very poor quality programs). After I finished the course, I found signing out a field camera was not possible. Evidently the public was restricted to just making studio programming. I had no interest or experience in a studio setting and to make documentaries I needed a field camera and this was not allowed.

After my Soundview training and watching the uninteresting and completely non-local programming on all three of our local PEG channels, I tried, in several phone conversations with Mr. Tom Castelot from Soundview, to ask why they didn't air programming like Democracy Now that would increase viewership as it had elsewhere? Democracy Now is an award winning news program that airs on more than 500 stations in the US, often on cable access channels.

My conversations with Mr. Castelot were highly unpleasant. He heatedly told me that there were no complaints about Soundview's programming and viewership was just fine. In our last phone call, Mr. Castelot tried to hang up on me by yelling "Our conversation is over!" I stopped him by asking for the names of the members of Soundview's Board because no information seemed available. He told me to write him a letter and he would think about giving me their names, I said "Aren't their names public information?" He yelled, "Write me a letter!" and slammed down the phone. At that point, I gave up on cable access television.

Ever hopeful, in 2005, I was appointed to the Cable Advisory Council from Fairfield. I was not surprised to find other frustrated members already on the Council that had some of the same experiences as I had with Mr. Castelot and Soundview Media.

At that time, many Council members were hopeful because Soundview's license was up for renewal. Most members felt a preponderance of the evidence showed Soundview had a virtual stranglehold on the PEG channels and did not work cooperatively with the towns and was largely adversarial. Members hoped the DPUC would take corrective action on behalf of the public interest. As a requirement for the re-franchising, the DPUC ordered Soundview Media to come up with a schedule for town specific programming and to distribute \$60,000 from Cablevision for TV equipment. However, Mr. Castelot never met those deadlines; rebuffing schedules submitted by the towns and did not disperse this money. However, Soundview did manage to air some of Stratford's town meetings, albeit often without any sound.

Finally, the DPUC's ruling came down and Council members were stunned to find any of their remaining authority was taken away; Mr. Castelot was given more authority and now could decide how and when the \$60,000 was distributed based on very limited town specific access to just the G channel. It is also curious that after being chairman for more than 10 years Howard Jacobsen, from Fairfield, was not reappointed to the Council and shortly thereafter Fairfield was given a portion of the \$60,000.

In protest of the DPUC decision, I resigned in January 2007. In my opinion, Soundview Media and Mr. Castelot have taken the public out of public access television and I am hoping that the legislators of CT will address this very sorry situation.

I would like very much to be in person today to give my testimony, however my work schedule prevents me from doing so. Thank you for entering my testimony into the record.

Jody Eisemann, L.Ac.
284 Cedar Road
Southport, CT 06890
(203) 245-6595