

Pua Ford
8 Valley Road
Bethany, CT 06524-3140
7 March 2008

Energy and Technology Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3900
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Re: HB 5814: AAC Community Access Television

Senator Fonfara, Representative Fontana, and Committee members:

I live in Bethany, have produced programs for the public access channel in the Comcast-Seymour franchise since 1996, and have worked for Woodbridge Government Access Television in the "Area Two" franchise since 2004. I offer comment on HB 5814. My understanding is that this bill's main purpose is amending PA 07-253 AAC Certified Competitive Video Service.

I appreciate the intent of PA 07-253 and especially appreciate the amendments made before it passed in the last seconds of the 2007 legislative session. Clearly these were added to protect community access as we know it. But devil was in the details.

Many of us have been to meetings across the state concerning PA 07-253, and traded information, impressions and concerns. My primary concerns are (1) the transmission quality of community access provided by the AT&T U-Verse service and (2) the reported fees that AT&T is requesting for interconnection with community access operations.

Concerning signal quality, I am told nothing can be done technically or legislatively. But potential viewers—especially senior citizens who watch their own town government access almost as closely as Turner Classic Movies—should know well ahead of time what they may be getting from cable's competition.

It was reported at an Area 2 Cable Advisory Council subcommittee meeting that AT&T wants to charge each PEG access outlet at least \$5,000 for U-Verse interconnection, plus over \$200/month. This is enormously expensive for any PEG organization. Many think of Woodbridge as a wealthy town, but the government access budget last year was only \$7,200. A suggestion to use the subscriber PEG fee to cover that charge is not helpful; the fee is needed to continue PEG operations if subscribers move from cable TV service to the U-Verse.

I find no real relief from the prospect of this expense, except in section 8, subsection (b) on page 11 mentions "good faith negotiations." I wish this were clearer. I can only hope the DPUC is able to help the dozens of PEG operations facing this connection issue.

Section 1 of HB 5814

This measure all but names the third-party PEG provider in Area 2. Legislation for a special case is not best practice. But since the general principle favoring town-specific delivery of governmental programming in HB 5297 AAC Municipalities and Government-Access Television was ignored last year, we shouldn't be surprised by this step. *(Last year's testimony attached.)*

Respect for local standards and local culture is at the foundation of community access. Recognition that towns and schools are just as much customers of community access as viewers is basic. And the customer is always right. These ideas are obvious—even "self-evident."

Thanks to the DPUC's Alternative Dispute Resolution team, Woodbridge came to an agreement with the Area 2 PEG provider. But Woodbridge still maintains its prerogative to choose town-specific service, but was willing to exchange some programming hours for funding from Sound View. Milford came to their agreement on sharing the G channel after many months of acrimonious exchanges.

Orange has different desires—complete independence and no need for funding. Orange municipal campaigns are always very tough, but the two political parties are united in their desire to keep control of their G programming. I have to admire any bipartisan accord in that town.

If the Cable Advisory Council and the towns desiring town-specific channels had not been so frustrated in the course of the 2006 franchise renewal for Cablevision of Southern CT, neither last year's HB 5297 or this section of HB 5814 would be needed.

In addition

As long as there is space on the page, I voice support for HB 5682 - AAC Concerning High Speed Broadband Access. I'm sorry I did not have time to send testimony last Wednesday.

I also believe it would be good in the near future for our state to take a stand in support of Internet Neutrality, as was done in the Maine legislature last year.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

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Energy and Technology Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3900
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Re: **HB 5297: An Act Concerning Municipalities and Government Access Television**

Senator Fonfara, Representative Fontana, and Committee members:

I have produced programs of Bethany town meetings for public access since 1997 and provided programs of Amity school district meetings since 2000. Since 2004, I also have been the part-time coordinator for Woodbridge Government Access Television.

I urge support of this bill, with two possible revisions:

1. It should specifically apply to franchises that have the infrastructure to provide town-specific narrowcasting (Bethany does not), and
2. It could include school district's option to narrowcast Educational Access Television.

I believe that G programming is most meaningful when it involves one's own vote and community. Programs from outside your borders can be entertaining and instructive. I have watched the British House of Commons and the Naugatuck Burgesses occasionally. But they do not inform my vote.

Local control of G programming does not necessarily exclude programs produced outside a town's borders. In Woodbridge we have run the DOT hearing in Orange on a proposed railroad station, some talk shows hosted by the Woodbridge CGA representatives and other programs produced in Seymour-centered franchise (now Comcast),

Last summer there were two franchise renewals for Cablevision Area 2 (Fairfield, Bridgeport, Stratford, Milford, Orange & Woodbridge) and for Area 9 (ten towns in lower Fairfield County). The first included a dispute between the third-party Community Access Provider, Sound View Community Media on one hand and the Cable Advisory Council (CAC) & several towns on the other. The CAP wanted systemwide G programming only; the CAC and towns asked for separation from Sound View and support for narrowcasting.

Those who supported the CAC & towns' position were the Needs Assessment by Moss & Barnett of Minneapolis, the Attorney General's office, the Office of Consumer Counsel, Cablevision of Southern CT, and everyone who addressed this issue at the 6/7/2006 public hearing in Milford and wrote to the DPUC.

In the Area 9 docket, Sound View sought to become the new CAP. The Area Nine Cable Council (ANCC) argued for continuing their current organization, allowing all towns to narrowcast. The ANCC had similar widespread support for their position as the Area 2 CAC.

The Department of Public Utility Control decided that for existing and developing town-specific Government Access Television operations, Area 2 towns must compromise their narrowcasting schedule, but Area 9 towns may retain their right to self-determination. I urge passage of legislation which provides all towns in all franchises with the appropriate infrastructure the same rights.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.
Sincerely,



General Assembly

January Session, 2007

Proposed Bill No. 5297

LCO No. 170

Referred to Committee on Energy and Technology

Introduced by:

REP. DAVIS, 117th Dist.

SEN. CRISCO, 17th Dist.

**AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPALITIES AND GOVERNMENT-
ACCESS TELEVISION.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General
Assembly convened:

- 1 That the general statutes be amended to allow municipalities to
- 2 determine whether they will be served by a regional or town-specific
- 3 approach to government-access television.

Statement of Purpose:

To allow municipalities to decide how they will be served by
government-access television.