



**CGA Appropriations Committee
December 9, 2009 Public Hearing
Comments by Jennifer Evans, West Hartford Community Television**

Please Preserve Funds for the PEGPETIA Program

West Hartford Community Television urges you to reconsider sweeping the Public Educational and Governmental Programming and Educational Investment Account, when you consider the budget deficit mitigation. Another withdrawal of \$2.3 million will seriously affect local schools, government and community media.

PEGPETIA Funds Are Not Surplus Funds.

In 2007, the PEGPETIA account was set up as a legislative solution to a problem created by the as a result of proposed legislation to reduce regulation and promote competition among cable and video providers. Specifically, community access advocates noted the proposed certificate process with no term limit would end traditional franchises and their would be no opportunity for the community needs assessment, DPUC review or a way for community media, schools and towns to keep up with the technology necessary for migration to digital, HD, broadband and education needs. The account was created to relieve this concern were front-loaded to create a pool of money to be used over decades.

Sec. 16-331cc. Public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account. Tax. Penalty and interest. (a) There is established an account to be known as the "public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account", which shall be a separate, nonlapsing account within the General Fund. The account shall contain any moneys required by law to be deposited in the account and any interest or penalties collected by the Commissioner of Revenue Services pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section.

(b) The moneys in said account shall be expended by the Department of Public Utility Control as follows: (1) Fifty per cent of said moneys shall be available to local community antenna television and video advisory councils; state-wide community antenna television and video advisory councils; public, educational and governmental programmers and public, educational and governmental studio operators to subsidize capital and equipment costs related to producing and procuring such programming, and (2) fifty per cent of said moneys shall be available to boards of education and other education entities for education technology initiatives.

Since 2007, community media has faced many challenges... we learned we would be delivered not as a channel on AT&T but as a web application. We learned that traditional installation and maintenance responsibilities by cable and video providers would no longer be supported. PEGPETIA, is the one of the few components of PA-07-253 that has had a positive effect on community television's ability to provide open forum for free speech, community dialogue, cultural exchange and artistic expression. It is a critical

PEGPETIA makes a difference in local communities and schools.

West Hartford Community Television received a PEGPETIA grant in March 2008 to launch a citizen journalist program called "Be The Media" which embedded cameras in every public school, library and neighborhood. We are teaching media literacy and helping students and community volunteers become active participants in their community. This is just one of many innovative programs made possible because of PEGPETIA, programs that are necessary to the health of our local democracy. We encourage you to visit our website at www.whctv.org and see how this project is evolving into a valuable community tool.

PEGPETIA has been swept before. This sweep puts the grant program in jeopardy.

In discussions with the DPUC, it is our understanding that taking another 2.5 million will put the grant program at risk or that grants may be suspended entirely. This is not the first time this fund has been swept. It was swept in October and has been used for one-time transfers. We encourage the committee to consult with the DPUC about the viability of the program.

As of October 1, 2009. the amount contributed to the fund will be cut in half.

Sect 16 (c) (1) The account shall be supported solely through a tax equal to one-half of one per cent of the gross earnings from rendering community antenna television service, video programming service by satellite and certified competitive video service in this state for quarterly periods beginning on or after October 1, 2007, and before October 1, 2009, and a tax equal to one-quarter of one per cent of the gross earnings from rendering community antenna television service, video programming service by satellite and certified competitive video service in this state for quarterly periods beginning on or after October 1, 2009, by each person operating a community antenna television system under this chapter or a certified competitive video service pursuant to sections 16-331e to 16-331p, inclusive, and each person operating a business that provides one-

way transmission to subscribers of video programming by satellite. Such tax for a quarterly period shall be remitted to the Department of Revenue Services, on or before the last day of the month next succeeding the quarterly period, on a form prescribed by the Commissioner of Revenue Services, which form shall be signed by the person performing the duties of treasurer or an authorized agent or officer. For the purposes of this section, gross earnings in this state shall be determined in a manner consistent with chapter 211.

We urge you to leave the funds in this account so that they will be there when communities, non-profits and schools require them to keep up with technological changes.

Many non-profit organizations use WHC-TV to get out their message. Groups like The Bridge Family Center, Hopeworks, The Substance Abuse Commission, WHIRED, American Federation of the Blind and the Veterans Affairs Commission are just a few organizations that can attest to the value of using PEG channels to reach a broader audience. Last year, the Bloomfield/Health District conducted an innovative live chat call in program to get vital information out about the H1N1 virus. The health of our community is directly related our ability to communicate effectively with each other and participate in our government.

We understand that these are difficult times. However, this fund has already been used for budget mitigation numerous times, including as recently as October. The amount of money contributed to the fund is now significantly less. We ask that you reconsider taking so much from a fund that has the potential to affect so many local communities and students.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely Yours,



Jennifer Evans

Executive Director, West Hartford Community Television

Jennifer@westhartford.org