



**CGA Energy and Technology Committee
March 15, 2011 Public Hearing**

Testimony by Pua Ford, Media Specialist

**Support for Raised HB 5473 AAC Public Access Operations and
the Periodic Review of Video Providers**

My name is Pua Ford. I am the Media Issues specialist for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to comment on this bill. Our perspective on these issues is based on our 2008 position:

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that community access television channels must be adequately protected, promoted, and funded, regardless of the provider of TV/video services to Connecticut residents. Government should provide opportunities for citizen participation in decisions regarding community access, or PEG, TV.

Access to the public airwaves through modem TV or video communication is essential to the public interest and to League of Women Voters' mission and purpose – to protect civil liberties, to ensure open, transparent government, and to promote the public's right to know. To protect the public interest, high quality PEG transmission and PEG availability on basic service tiers are essential

Section 1

This is the fourth year that Periodic Review of the cable television and competitive video industry has come before this committee. The League has strongly supported periodic review with the hope that various problems that have arisen since the introduction of competitive video might be addressed.

What is different this year is the recent Draft Decision on Docket 11-08-06 Public Utilities Regulatory Authority Investigation into Community Access Programming and Operations. A review process for the community access providers (CAPs), not the cable/video providers, is proposed. We had hopes that the proposed reviews might take care of some issues and will offer Written Exceptions to the Draft Decision for possible changes.

A review of cable and video providers as proposed here may be better, because it can address issues not covered by a review of CAPs, such as consumer issues. Some had expected that a competitive marketplace would allow consumers to vote with their dollars, making regulation unnecessary, but after four years we have doubts.

Section 2

CAPs and other community access programmers need operating funds as well as capital funds. Even with available volunteer labor, some paid staff is needed to complete the mission of community access. In some places, the only source for this compensation is the per subscriber fees for community access support. We support this section as helpful to the smaller community access operations, and as equitable and fair, since larger CAPs already use the per subscriber fees for personnel costs.

Section 3

It is our understanding that some town-specific channels lost funding after PA 07-253. If this matter has not yet been settled by DPUC or PURA, we support this section to restore their funds, the same as we would support adequate funding for other community access programming.

Section 4

Although this appears to be a simple update of statutory language, the term "entity" is vague and open to unintended consequences. We urge caution in considering this.

Section 5

The League strongly supports restoration of the Connecticut Broadband Internet Coordinating Council, which continued to meet and discuss issues even without a budget. The recent study by the CT Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) on broadband access and adoption includes a description of CBICC and its role in advising both this committee and a proposed broadband cabinet. It appears to be the only group that brings public and private sectors to the table, and has been a new window on their thoughts concerning broadband internet needs. CBICC was on the point of reporting to your committee this year before members learned that their establishment had been repealed, and the council was forced to suspend activity.

CBICC's discussions of "e-government" services and the needs of municipal governments for better connectivity focused on many issues of concern such as to emergency management, proposed election reforms and the statewide voter database and the improvement of education. Their work should continue.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on these issues today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Connecticut.

Pua Ford, Media Issues Specialist
League of Women Voters of Connecticut