



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.®

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**CGA Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing February 11, 2014
HB 5030 AA Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year
Ending June 30, 2015
Comments on Restoration of Funding Swept from PEGPETIA
Submitted by Pua Ford, Media Issues Specialist
League of Women Voters of Connecticut**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to comment today on HB 5030 – AA Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015. I regret that work obligations prevent me from attending this evening's public hearing.

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.

Adjustments to the next fiscal year budget should include restoration of funding to the Public Educational Governmental Programming and Educational Technology Investment Account (PEGPETIA), defined in Connecticut General Statutes section 16-331cc. The sweeps to the account that were made in PA 13-184, the biennial budget legislation, already have proven harmful to community access television in the current fiscal year.

The purpose of the fund is to provide for capital expenses not otherwise available to community access television organizations. In the 2007 legislation that incorporated Internet Protocol Television (IPTV, such as U-Verse and FiOS) into statutes regarding utilities, regulation of cable television was relaxed and franchise review was no longer required. In the past, the franchise renewal process provided a review of the community access provider's capital needs. Without that process, there would be no opportunity for these organizations to upgrade equipment in this time of fast-changing and very expensive technology.

The PEGPETIA money is distributed as a grant program by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority, half for community access and half for educational technology. The process requires thought, research and planning by applicants. They are sometimes asked for more information to justify their requests and prove that they are serving their communities.

Because of the current year's sweep of \$3.4 million, the grant program administered by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA) was suspended in November 2013. Most applicants had to settle for a reduction of their original request, as PURA tried to make the funding stretch to every worthy applicant. Hartford Public Access Television submitted a thoughtful application to completely upgrade their facilities but had to be turned away because the PEGPETIA fund is depleted. The grant program cannot be resumed given the scheduled sweep of \$3.5 million more in 2014-2015.

Local community access media provides opportunities that YouTube and other internet outlets cannot. What happens in your own backyard, your own neighborhood—the transparency of the local government, the activities in your children's schools, and the thoughts of your fellow citizens—is more easily found when locally produced for the access channels. In many communities, this is the only place you can see your local election forums and debates sponsored by our local Leagues.

The organizations that provide our access to the media operate on very tight budgets compared to their counterparts in other states. PEGPETIA has been the sole opportunity to improve their operations in a meaningful way. Given the improved financial condition of the state, as reported by OFA and OPM in November, we do not believe that sweeps of this small special fund are justified anymore. The PEGPETIA money should be restored to its original purpose.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring this to your attention.