



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.®
1890 Dixwell Avenue, Suite 203
Hamden, CT 06514-3183

203-288-7996 Fax 203-288-7998 www.lwvct.org

**CGA Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
Public Hearing – March 9, 2015**

OPPOSITION TO

**SB 946 – AN ACT CONCERNING REVENUE ITEMS TO IMPLEMENT THE
GOVERNOR'S BUDGET**

Submitted by Pua Ford, Media Issues Specialist, LWVCT

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity today to offer comment on the Governor's Bill, SB 946.

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.

LWVCT opposes sections 34 and 35 of this bill, which directs that all revenues collected in PEGPETIA—the public, educational, and governmental programming and educational technology investment account—be swept into the General Fund in each of the fiscal years for this budget. We recognize that the state budget is under stress and requires sacrifices by everyone, but the proposed amounts would have a destructive impact. We suggest lowering the amount of PEGPETIA funds to be transferred, and leaving enough in the account to continue a program vital to community access centers and educational organizations.

- Whereas other special accounts are reduced to help the state's finances, this account was swept so completely in the previous budget cycle that the grant program was shut down in fall, 2013. PURA did this to comply with legislation for the 2013-14 budget year and make the required money available. The application by Hartford Public Access to replace old and failing equipment had to be turned away. **This program suspension will happen again if the current bill passes with the two sections as written.**
- Bonding to restore \$3.5 million (a year's worth of PEGPETIA revenue) was approved at the end of the 2014 session. Additional effort was required just to get this on the agenda of the state Bond Commission, taking time and labor that PEG access personnel could better use at their centers.
- The bond funding for PEGPETIA was approved in January this year, and PURA reinstated the program in early February. In the four weeks since—after over a year's hiatus—applications totaling \$3,155,842.32 have been submitted for nine community access organizations and twelve schools and districts. Some are for replacing 20-year-old equipment. If all grants are approved, that leaves less

than \$400,000 for the rest of this fiscal year. Eleven other nonprofit, independent community access providers and approximately 80 town-specific governmental and educational channels are eligible for **half** of this remainder.

- Bonding funds to replace these sweeps is not acceptable again. Even if approved, recovering the money by this uncertain means would stop and start the grant program, which can lead to panicked submissions and poor long-term planning by the applicants. It would again waste the time and energy of PEG access people and of OPM staff.
- Other means of bargaining for capital expenses was eliminated in 2007 with the advent of Internet Protocol Television. PEGPETIA was supposed to take care of the community organizations when the franchise renewal process was eliminated.
- Doing more with less is a long-standing tradition in community access. The official community access providers have no meaningful way to cover both operating and capital costs on the per subscriber funds. The town-specific channels may call on their local governments and schools for help, but all local resources are scarce these days.
- Nonprofit PEGs are not government entities, but they do carry out functions mandated in the statutes since the 1980s. Many complement public safety agencies in their communities and provide an open window to local governments. All provide an outlet for free expression in a local, public forum and technological literacy to the residents in their areas.

Please lower the scheduled sweeps and provide relief to community access organizations. Thank you for the opportunity to offer our testimony to the Committee today.

Suggested substitute language:

Sec. 34. (*Effective July 1, 2015*) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 16-331cc of the general statutes, the sum of [\$4,200,000] **\$2,200,000** shall be transferred from the public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account and credited to the resources of the General Fund for the fiscal year ending 1104 June 30, 2016.

Sec. 35. (*Effective July 1, 2016*) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 16-331cc of the general statutes, the sum of [\$4,300,000] **\$2,300,000** shall be transferred from the public, educational and governmental programming and education technology investment account and credited to the resources of the General Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017.