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**CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee  
 Public Hearing – February 22, 2016**

**SUPPORT and COMMENTS**

**SB 104 – AA Establishing the State Civic Network**

**Submitted by Pua Ford, Media Issues Specialist**

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The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity today to offer comment on proposed Senate Bill 104, based on the position adopted by our membership in 2008:

*The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that community access television channels – for public, educational, and governmental programming – must be adequately protected, promoted, and funded, regardless of the provider of TV/video services to Connecticut residents. Statewide public affairs programming, such as provided by The Connecticut Network (CT-N), must be adequately protected, promoted, and funded by the state legislature and available to all Connecticut residents, regardless of the provider of TV/video services. Government should provide opportunities for citizen participation in decisions regarding community access, or PEG, TV.*

*Access to the public airwaves through modem TV/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.*

The League supports increased transparency in all government proceedings, at all levels. We have some doubts about per subscriber funding as a reliable financial source, but stand by those who have studied the risks and choose this path to serve the public better. We suggest two minor changes to this bill in order to protect the community access channels.

**Transparency:** We support SB 104 for its primary intent is to expand transparency in Connecticut state government proceeding. There have already been many public hearings we wished had been recorded, here and at the Public Utility Regulatory Authority. The 2014 transfer of assets (including U-Verse) from AT&T to Frontier Communications was surely of statewide interest, but those hearings were not available on television or the internet. A return to more coverage in many other areas of our state government will be most valuable to the public.

**Section 7 of this bill:** CGS sec. 16-331cc(g) describes the one-time allocation of PEGPETIA money to connect CT-N to U-Verse. It should be repealed rather than amended, but it does serve as an example of some government proceedings happen beyond the view of any camera, a deal made without all affected parties in the same room and entered into bill amendments before the midnight bell rings at the end of the legislative session. We suggest for SB 104:

Sec. 7. Subsection (g) of section 16-331cc of the general statutes is repealed. (*Effective July 2016*)

**Section 1 of this bill:** Knowing that transparency cannot be taken for granted in any branch of government, we propose another change to the bill as presented, in order to preserve the intent to create original funding. If this bill succeeds in becoming a public act, the process of creating a state civic network moves on to PURA. There should be no attempt to lump funding for a state civic network together with the existing per subscriber funding for Community Access Providers. This would be injurious to both. Instead of Section 1 of this bill, please amend CGS Section 16-1(a)(45) to read:

(45) ["The Connecticut Television Network" means the General Assembly's state-wide twenty-four-hour state public affairs programming service, separate and distinct from community access channels] "The State Civic Network" means the state-wide cable programming channel and Internet web site, separate and distinct from community access channels, established under section 2 of this act that provides (A) live and archived coverage of state government and civic affairs, and (B) access to information about the processes and actions of the legislative, executive and judicial branches;

Please also consider that the original version of this language assured CT-N its own channel on cable and U-Verse service; this situation should continue. The *State Civic Network Operational Plan* (dated 2/09/16) does not include a public studio or training for residents to learn the technology for producing their own programs on the state channel or web site. So the proposed network is already obviously distinct from Community Access Providers. But the legislation should explicitly state this fact.

**Assets:** We understand that one of the current barriers to more coverage is the aging equipment in the Capitol and Legislative Office Building—cameras and robotic controls—used by CT-N. We hear that bond money that was approved by legislature for capital improvements has yet to be released by the State Bond Commission. Any organization—whether we call it a public affairs network or a civic network—needs to have direct control and responsibility for its equipment in order to carry out its mission. Section 3(d) of this bill deserves your special attention for this reason. In the unfortunate event that this bill does not proceed all the way to a public act, we hope that this committee or the Joint Committee on Legislative Management will do something to alleviate that situation. If CT-N remains as a state public affairs network, let them have control of their equipment.

**Per Subscriber Funding:** The choice to seek per subscriber funding seems perilous, when this funding model has become less reliable for PEG access television. In these fiscally-strained times, all choices are perilous. The erosion of the cable subscriber base has already affected adversely the basic operational funding for the 34 designated Community Access Providers (CAPs), especially the nonprofit organizations. The PEGPETIA fund, which was supposed to address capital equipment needs in the absence of cable franchise review, has been swept clean several years in a row, so equipment replacement and upgrade is far more difficult. In Docket 12-08-20, a review of community access operations, PURA advised Skye Cable XIII of Waterbury to budget a larger percentage of its budget for equipment, even if PEGPETIA was not available for grants. CAPs are forced to choose between personnel and equipment in their budgets.

Last year, an effort to keep at least one year's worth of money in PEGPETIA failed when the final budget was approved in special session. Three other bills brought to the Energy and Technology

Committee proposed expanding the subscriber base contributing to community access support, to include those who subscribe to any service (like broadband internet) from the same companies that provide cable or video service. Those bills died in committee.

Additional fund-raising beyond the per-subscriber funding is already a standard practice for the CAPs. They seek revenue with gala events, fund-raising drives and citrus sales—added work for people already working overtime for their local communities. A state civic network may need personnel devoted to development to realize the full vision.

**Finally**, knowing that most bills go through many versions as they progress, we urge legislators to include Community Access Providers as well as CT-N or cable/video company representatives in any meetings that may occur after today's hearing.

Thanks to the Committee for considering our testimony.