March 8, 2019

To: Subcommittee for Conservation and Development,
   Appropriations Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
   and DEEP Commissioner Dykes

I attended the Committee’s public hearing on February 27 to learn more about the budget process, with a focus on my role as media issues specialist on the League of Women Voters of CT Public Issues Team. I still do not know enough to offer proper testimony but have a comment to offer as the Subcommittee goes into the work session with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

**My main point is:** In case the PEGPETIA grant program can be revived, I hope that the Public Utility Regulatory Authority will have staff available to run it.

An issue I have been following in the past six years is recovering the Public, Educational, and Governmental Programming and Educational Technology Investment Account (PEGPETIA) grant program administered by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority. In the 2017-19 state budget, PEGPETIA was swept into the General Fund for 2018 “and each fiscal year thereafter.” (CGS 16-331ii).

In the current legislative session, four bills were submitted to repeal the language, and one (HB 5486) was included in the March 4 public hearing of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. Testimony from several parties in favor of the repeal can explain the need for the program by community access television/media operators and schools, as well as the history of the sweeps (Jennifer Evans, WHC-TV) and the list of applications and grants (LWVCT).

A successful repeal is only one step. If it happens, I only hope that the 2019-21 will not completely sweep the account, and the program can be reopened. The program has been closed effectively for lack of funds since 2013. The one exception was four lightning weeks in 2015 when total application amounts exceeded the $3.5 million bond that returned money to the program.

Community access television is only a small part of cable television, which is only a small part of public utilities, which is only one part of Energy and Environmental Protection. And we recognize that it is not big enough to be mentioned in DEEP’s Mission or Core Services. Nevertheless the community access centers are part of their local communities and culture, provide jobs and training for their neighbors, and deserve some share of the funds promised them when PA 07-253 changed cable regulation in Connecticut.

Thank you for your hard work on budgets and for your attention,

Pua Ford, media issues specialist
League of Women Voters of CT