



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

December 20, 2018

The Honorable Mazie Hirono
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

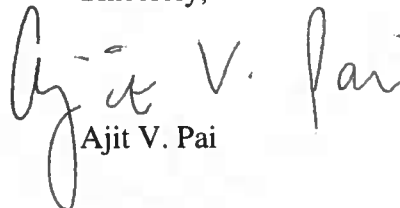
Dear Senator Hirono:

Thank you for your letter regarding the impact that the statutory cap on franchise fees has on funding for public, educational, or governmental (PEG) channels. As you know, the Communications Act limits franchise fees to 5% of cable revenues and defines “franchise fee” to include “any tax, fee, or assessment of any kind imposed by a franchising authority or other governmental entity on a cable operator or cable subscriber, or both, solely because of their status as such.” 47 U.S.C. § 542(g)(1). The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has held that the terms “tax” and “assessment” can include nonmonetary exactions. *Montgomery County, Md. et al. v. FCC*, 863 F.3d 485, 490-91 (6th Cir. 2017).

In response to a remand from the Sixth Circuit, the Commission unanimously issued its Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to consider the scope of the congressionally-mandated statutory limit on franchise fees. Among other things, the Commission observed that Congress broadly defined franchise fees; indeed, with respect to PEG channels, it only excluded support payments with respect to franchises granted prior to October 30, 1984 as well as capital costs required by franchises granted after that date. 47 U.S.C. § 542(g)(2)(B) & (C). The record of this proceeding remains open, and I encourage all interested parties and stakeholders—including local franchising authorities—to provide us with relevant evidence regarding these issues so that the Commission can make the appropriate judgment about the path forward, consistent with federal law. Your views will be entered into the record of the proceeding and considered as part of the Commission’s review.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,


Ajit V. Pai