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19-4

January 2, 2019

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

I write to urge you to maintain essential funding for local public, educational, or governmental (PEG) television channels by preserving the terms of agreements between cable operators and local franchising authorities (LFA).

In Massachusetts, access to local government is a cornerstone of society. What began with the Town Meetings convened by the Pilgrims has evolved into active community engagement across the Commonwealth. Today, many households rely on broadcasts produced by PEG channels as their primary tool for monitoring their local government's proceedings in real time.

As you know, the Federal Communications Commission has historically asked cable operators to collaborate with LFAs by contributing approximately five percent of their local cable fees to help support PEG channels in the LFA's broadcast area. These fees account for large percentages of PEG broadcasters' annual budgets—budgets that are directly used to perform the public service of airing vitally important local government broadcasts.

Regrettably, I fear your agency's proposal to alter the terms of cable operators' PEG contributions will do irreparable harm to the viability of local cable broadcasting. By assigning monetary value to government-owned airwaves and permitting cable operators to use that value to account for their local contribution, local broadcasters will be stripped of critical financial resources and left scrambling to meet the public access needs of their communities. In the end, PEG broadcasters could ultimately go dark, depriving households throughout the country of the opportunity to participate in local government.

As a fellow public servant, I believe you understand the duties of accessibility and transparency we owe to our constituents. To that end, I urge you to rescind your proposal, preserve access to local government, and ultimately help more Americans work to better their communities. If I can be of any assistance in this effort, please contact Michael Wertheimer in my office at (202) 225-3111 or Michael.Wertheimer@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. R. Keating", is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

WILLIAM R. KEATING
Member of Congress