

May 4, 2020

**Via Electronic Filing**

Ms. Marlene Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 Twelfth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: RM-11854  
Petition for Rulemaking of GeoBroadcast Solutions LLC  
Amendment of Section 74.1231(i) of the Commission's Rules on  
FM Broadcast Booster Stations**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Beasley Media Group, LLC, Cumulus Media Inc., Entercom Communications Corp., and iHeartCommunications, Inc. hereby submit this statement pursuant to Public Notice Report No. 3145 (released Apr. 2, 2020), whereby the Commission has provided the opportunity to submit statements regarding the Petition for Rulemaking (the "Petition") filed by GeoBroadcast Solutions LLC ("GeoBroadcast"). The GeoBroadcast Petition proposes the amendment of 47 C.F.R. Section 74.1231(i) to allow FM booster stations to insert programming distinct from that being broadcast by the associated full-service primary FM broadcast station for zoned broadcasting, or, as referred to by GeoBroadcast by its trademarked term, "ZoneCasting™." While this, or similar, technologies to provide for zoned broadcasting by FM booster facilities may ultimately prove valuable, the parties here caution the Commission to develop first a record of the feasibility of the technology based on further experimental authorizations before considering issuing the requested Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

We, as radio broadcasters, support innovative solutions geared towards improved service to the listening public; however, technologies that are not yet widely proven which could cause interference to the primary signal, as well as confusion among radio listeners as the primary signal is handed off to a localized signal, should not prematurely be adopted as a default standard without more real-world experience gathered with experimental authorizations. The Commission must be fully confident, based on extensive real-world testing, that the benefits outweigh potential harms. Automatically authorizing such an unproven technology, as would be the case under the Petitioner's rulemaking proposal, is particularly premature given the proponent's acknowledgment that listeners will experience some degree of "self-interference," as the booster signal is handed off from the primary programming to the zone programming. See Petition at Exhibit C at 6-7.

As background, the GeoBroadcast Petition includes a statement from its consulting engineer citing to experimental studies conducted by GeoBroadcast of its proprietary, first generation ZoneCasting technology in Salt Lake City, Utah (KDUT), and Sebring, Florida (WVOJ), and then, with a different prediction methodology, GeoBroadcast-sponsored laboratory testing at Towson University, followed by a singular test by GeoBroadcast of its second generation ZoneCasting technology in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (WILL). See Petition at Exhibit C. Moreover, while GeoBroadcast's consulting engineer states that the ZoneCasting platform is based on GeoBroadcast's MaxxCasting™ system, due to the insertion of localized information on specific booster nodes, its engineer concedes that the ZoneCasting platform differs from the currently employed MaxxCasting system. See *id.* at 3.

In short, according to GeoBroadcast, to date, there has been only one real-world experimental test (Milwaukee) of the current generation of its ZoneCasting technology. That is a slim basis for the Commission to proceed with a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to change the booster rule to allow automatic use of a barely-tested technology system with known downsides. A Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, with the Commission adopting the text revisions proposed by GeoBroadcast, would essentially endorse the ZoneCasting technology without the need for implementors to report back to the Commission on the benefits, problems and/or weaknesses of the system. The adoption of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, with a Commission-proposed rule change, would only make sense at a point in the future when third parties can formulate legitimate comments based on either direct experience with the technology, or grounded in widespread experimentation in varied locations.

There simply is no necessity to rush into a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at this point, when the better option is to authorize more testing through experimental authorizations, covering varying geographic, market and spectrum-use areas, in order to provide a fact-based foundation to evaluate the possible benefits and risks of the technology to the broadcast industry and the listening public. If this technology generates significant listener confusion as they cross transition zones, particularly when driving through alternate programming zones while listening to FM radio in their vehicles, independent parties will need to study whether the end result could be to drive listeners to leave the medium, which could harm all broadcasters seeking to serve listeners via over-the-air FM transmission.

The Commission has deep experience with testing and evaluating new technologies via experimental authorizations, requests for which may be submitted by broadcast stations pursuant to 47 C.F.R. Section 5.203, and which permit the Commission to require the submission of a report of the research and results of the experimental operation, serving a firm foundation for rule making consideration. For example, experimental authorizations have been issued by the Commission for: Single Sideband Suppressed Carrier Modulation (W250BC, Atlanta, GA and WHQT(FM), New York, NY); All-Digital AM (WWFD(FM), Frederick, MD); Modulation Dependent Carrier Level (“MDCL”) controls (over 60 stations using MDCL under experimental authorizations or waivers at the time the FCC authorized MDCL control technologies); HD Radio (iBiquity Digital experimental stations 1650 kHz, Cincinnati, OH, 1670 kHz, Frederick, MD, and 1700 kHz, Warren, NJ). The Commission also typically conditions continuance of the experimental authority on the lack of objectionable interference. When appropriate, the Commission may extend the experimental authority to further develop the operational record.

Continuing to explore the technology and feasibility of local programming and advertising insertions by FM boosters via experimental authorizations will allow broadcasters to report back to the Commission on their and their listener’s experiences with what may ultimately be a promising technology. Such a real-world record, with informed comments by the broadcast industry, would then form the basis for Commission consideration of permanent rule changes, if appropriate. With the current lack of such a record, the issuance by the Commission of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking as proposed by GeoBroadcast would be premature without more vetting in the real-world.

Respectfully submitted,

**Beasley Media Group, LLC**

By: /s/ Michael Cooney

Michael Cooney  
Chief Technology Officer & Executive Vice  
President Engineering  
Beasley Media Group, LLC  
3033 Riviera Drive, Suite 200  
Naples, FL 34103  
1-239-263-5000  
Mike.cooney@bbgi.com

**Cumulus Media Inc.**

By: /s/ Richard S. Denning

Richard S. Denning, Esq.  
Executive Vice President, General Counsel &  
Secretary  
Cumulus Media Inc.  
3280 Peachtree Street, NW Suite 2200  
Atlanta, GA 30305  
1-404-260-6677  
Richard.denning@cumulus.com

**Entercom Communications Corp.**

By: /s/ Tim Murphy

Tim Murphy  
Executive Vice President, Corporate Business  
Development  
Entercom Communications Corp.  
2400 Market Street, 4th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
1-610-660-5610  
[Tim.murphy@entercom.com](mailto:Tim.murphy@entercom.com)

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**iHeartCommunications, Inc.**

By: /s/ Jessica Marventano

Jessica Marventano, Esq.  
Senior Vice President, Government Affairs  
iHeartMedia Inc.  
419 7<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20004  
1-202-289-3225  
JessicaMarventano@iheartmedia.com