

Northbridge Community Television

Bill Tartaglia,
Executive Director
198 Church Ave.
Northbridge, MA 01534
508-234-0200

Honorable, Chairman Pai and distinguished members of the FCC,

Northbridge Community Television has been in operation for close to 30 years. In 2009, we became a small 501(c)(3) charitable organization. In the past 10 years our annual operational budget fluctuates from 125,000-200,000, based on all gross sales of services made by Charter Spectrum subscribers in Northbridge MA. We receive funding for 4500 households in Northbridge. However we actually serve close to 8000 households in many different ways. NCTV gets 3.5% of gross annual revenue from Charter Spectrum for all sales in Northbridge including TV, internet, phones and home shopping clubs. It is important to remember this is funding coming from residents, not Charter Spectrum.

According to a FCC spokesperson, if these proposed rules are successful, we will no longer receive 3.5% of gross annual revenue of all monies collected in the Town of Northbridge within 30-60 days. This is protected in our contract which expires in 2023. However, these proposed rules will change our contract midstream. It is my understanding that at least one of these rules will only allow "cable TV" revenue which will significantly affect our funding at a rapid pace. The other rule will allow in-kind contributions to also affect our funding. These 2 rules, even though it is possible that it is not the FCC's intention, will completely eliminate community TV including education, government and public. This will especially affect small 501(c)3 charitable non-profits like our. Town and school based facilities may survive but a small 501(c)3 has no chance.

Part of your proposed rules is to only allow "cable TV" revenue for PEG funding. That is a large issue. Charter Spectrum will re categorize cable TV to data. At that point the cable TV funding will be gone. I actually worked for Charter for years and there has been talk about re categorizing cable TV to data for a very long time. This will happen. All funding will be gone as data driven devices and TV's are now carrying "cable TV" from Charter Spectrum.

If the de-funding rule doesn't work, then the in-kind rule will. That means the cable provider can place a value on our 3 community channels and charge us back for the privilege of having our own community channels. Then they can bill us for the use of the fiber. Any services from the school or town related to anything related to their responsibility in the cable license. Every piece of equipment Charter Spectrum uses to facilitate our 3 channels or used by the town in any way can now be charged back to the town and to the community TV charity. We fully expect if this bill gets through to have to actually pay a bill to Charter Spectrum or to have to close down completely. It is very sad that America stands for free speech. However our own federal government, whether or not that is their intention, are considering making rules to shut down the only real soapbox for a person to use their free speech without censorship or gavel.

These are the issues we will face at our charitable organization if one or both of these rules are enacted:

1. We have 7 years left on our lease. A large section of our funding is gone due to this agreement.
2. Since we do not have the funding of a Boston based community channel we were forced to purchase lighting equipment within interest free loan. We are currently we are paying off a 9000.00 with the help of National Grid. More funding gone.
3. We have 3 dedicated staff members. Layoffs are expected which means less services, less outreach, less hours of availability to our residents.
4. We just upgraded all three of our channels with new equipment including playback which was desperately needed for us to stay in operation totaling 60,000. Our budget took a significant hit doing this but we needed to keep all 3 channels up and running. Back when the purchase was agreed, we had no idea this FCC action was coming otherwise we would have held back.

5. We lease our facility from the American Legion Post 343 in Northbridge. We did this to save the Legion from certain closure. Since we have started working with the Legion, they have the funding to donate another part of the building to "The Virtual Giving Tree." This organization provides needy seniors with items they just cannot afford. The seniors would get approved by the senior center in town and they would be provided with food for their cats, toiletries, soaps, water, and food. We actually pay the utilities for both the Legion and the Virtual Giving Tree. With our rent revenue gone, the Legion and the Virtual Giving Tree will no longer have our support and will certainly close.
6. We donate equipment, technical support, funding and our studio to the school for their use. All that we do for the school will be greatly affected if not totally shut down.
7. Last Christmas NCTV donated 250.00 to the Rockdale Youth Center along with coloring and activity books with crayons. The cash donation was given out to the students who use the facility in gift cards. This year with the uncertainty of funding I expect that will not happen again this year.
8. Town meeting coverage will greatly hindered or completely stopped.
9. We have 15 active volunteers producing 7-10 productions a week. Sometimes more. Everything from Rams Baseball and Football, Legion Baseball, Junior League Baseball. We have shows that discuss current issues, ideas, news and entertainment. We also broadcast 5 different local from town church services for shut-ins, seniors and for all to enjoy.
10. I myself have dedicated 18 years of my life to this facility.
11. Currently we are open at least 50 hours a week. If the rules are enacted and we still can stay open, hours will drastically change.

Our Community TV channels have already been attacked by Charter Spectrum with a breach in the cable license which further weakening our stance in the community and financially. In 2013 the Town of Northbridge signed a cable license with channels 11, 12 and 13 reserved in the cable license for use by the public, education and government until 2023. In 2014 Charter Spectrum violated that license without notice to our facility and moved our channels to 191, 192 and 194 placing their Spectrum owned commercial channel which mostly plays infomercials at 193 breaking up the 3 community channels. An interesting side note. Spectrum is now referring to channel 193 as regional access. It is my contention Spectrum plans to run a regional access channel to replace the channels that these rules could possibly de-fund. The unapproved moving our resident's community channels has hurt us significantly. You do not have to be in the community television industry to see how being on channels 11, 12 and 13 for 25+ years, then all of a sudden, without notice or approval by the town, Spectrum moves them. This anti-community tactic has caused and will continue to cause significant damage to the integrity of our channels and the outreach we perform everyday. Charter Spectrum's response to fix the breach was to raise the bills of the consumers in Northbridge and to give that additional funding to our community TV facility to make up for their breach. Northbridge Community TV rejected the residents paying to clear their breach in the license. Charter Spectrum remains in breach of contract.

Yet another possible move for our channels is in the future. Charter Spectrum made a statement in writing regarding the forced moving of the community channels in Hawaii, quote: "*Specific to PEG Access Channels, Charter is providing a contiguous local public policy and government genre channel grouping that is consistent nationwide. The location of PEG Access Channels in this grouping will be consistent and reasonably contiguous statewide.*" The threat in Hawaii was to move their channels to the 1300's. This year, the community channels in 5 towns in Massachusetts were moved to the 1300's. At the Board of Selectmen Meeting on 10/20/2014, the Selectmen were told all community channels in Massachusetts will be on 191, 192 and 194. We can only expect the near future, if we survive this funding emergency that moving of our community channels will happen once again.

Due to the trend of cable cutting there are many other options now available to entertain consumers. On channel 11 we were able to cost effectively use underwriting to generate funding. Now on 191, the value for underwriting has significantly diminished and no longer cost effective. Our underwriting program had to be scrapped.

Ironically, community television is the only thing that we can do and Charter Spectrum cannot. Furthermore, community TV is the only thing Charter Spectrum can offer their subscribers that no other provider can do. Charter Spectrum gets FREE programming from us everyday. When it was a partnership it was so good for both of us. NCTV and Charter were both out for our collective common good. Since the federal government decided it was okay to allow these cable companies to expand to the point of a mega-corporation the local communities have suffered.

I have seen an argument that says community television is the reason for such high cable bills. The way we see it, Charter Spectrum throwing 7 million dollars so far in 2018 at lobbyists and handing over a 98 million salary and benefits to Thomas Rutledge CEO for Charter Spectrum for one year's work is the actual issue. Surely 3.5% of a customer's bill to support to support our charitable work should not.

We are very proud of the work our volunteers perform every day along with my dedicated staff of 2. Every day our volunteers strive to create thought provoking and innovative local television and NCTV staff is to support our volunteers technically and sometimes emotionally. We have become a family.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Tartaglia
Executive Director
Northbridge Community Television Inc.
11/13/2018