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May 22, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20536

530

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I write to express my concerns about the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) recent proposal for implementing Section 111 of the STELA Reauthorization Act of 2014 (STELAR). For my home state of Colorado, this proposal could lead to higher prices for cable television service, especially for basic cable customers in our rural markets. It may also lead to fewer video programming choices for lower-income Coloradans.

Section 111 of STELAR requires the FCC to streamline the petition process for small cable operators to seek an exemption from certain regulations. The small operators must demonstrate that they operate in markets where sufficient competition ensures reasonable rates and meaningful choice of programming. Congress's intent was to reduce the burden on small cable providers that often have fewer resources to undertake the petition process. However, the FCC's proposal to eliminate its presumption of "no effective competition" may benefit large cable companies.

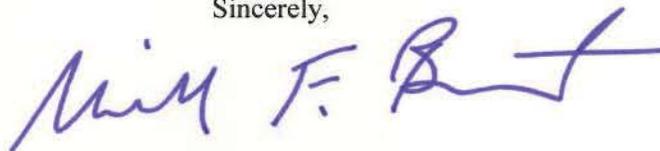
Presuming that effective competition for video programming exists in every community could remove a local franchising authority's ability to regulate the service rates charged by all cable companies, large and small. It may also eliminate the requirement to maintain basic cable service for all consumers. This could lead to fewer programming options if large cable operators remove less profitable local stations and public, educational, and governmental access (PEG) channels from the basic cable service tier.

Colorado has more than 500 distinct cable communities. Less than half have been deemed by the FCC to be effectively competitive for pay television services and many of these communities rely on the basic tier of service. The FCC's proposal could have a negative effect on these communities that rely on the basic tier for critical local news and educational broadcasts.

I ask the FCC to reconsider its proposal and make only those changes directed by Congress in Section 111 of STELAR. I have long advocated for the need of local, in-state programming for the Four Corners region of our state. The FCC's proposal could undermine those efforts and risk removal of far more local programming to higher, more expensive tiers.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 5, 2015

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
458 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Thank you for your letter expressing concern about the Commission's implementation of Section 111 of the STELA Reauthorization Act of 2014 (STELAR).

As you know, Congress established the test for Effective Competition currently implemented by the Commission in the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992 ("1992 Cable Act"). The statutory test for the type of Effective Competition at issue in the proposed Order is satisfied if the franchise area is "(i) served by at least two unaffiliated [MVPDs] each of which offers comparable video programming to at least 50 percent of the households in the franchise area; and (ii) the number of households subscribing to programming services offered by [MVPDs] other than the largest [MVPD] exceeds 15 percent of the households in the franchise area."¹ When the Commission adopted the presumption of no Effective Competition in 1993, incumbent cable operators had approximately a 95 percent market share of MVPD subscribers.

In the more than twenty years since Congress's 1992 instructions, competition in the video marketplace has increased dramatically. The nationwide presence of DIRECTV (which provides local broadcast channels to 197 markets representing over 99 percent of U.S. homes) and DISH Network (which provides local broadcast channels to all 210 markets), alongside the significant number of direct broadcast satellite (DBS) subscribers (34.2 million or 33.9 percent of MVPD subscribers),² results in approval of Effective Competition petitions in almost every instance. The FCC has granted Effective Competition petitions in over 10,000 communities thus far and found that Effective Competition exists in more than 99.5 percent of the communities evaluated since 2013.

¹ 47 U.S.C. § 543(l)(1). This type of Effective Competition is known as Competing Provider Effective Competition. The other three types of Effective Competition defined in the statute are Low Penetration Effective Competition, Municipal Provider Effective Competition, and Local Exchange Carrier (LEC) Effective Competition. Only a presumption of Competing Provider Effective Competition is at issue in this proceeding.

² *Annual Assessment of the Status of Competition in the Market for the Delivery of Video Programming*, Sixteenth Report, 30 FCC Rcd 3253, 3256, ¶¶ 2, and 3300-01, ¶¶ 112-113 (2015).

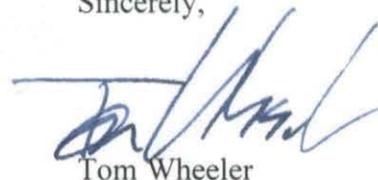
In adopting a rebuttable presumption of Competing Provider Effective Competition, the Commission provided the administrative relief for small cable operators required by Section 111 of STELAR. It also preserved the ability of local franchising authorities (LFAs) to rate regulate if they are able to provide data refuting the presumption. Less than one-fifth of the communities currently eligible to rate regulate have taken the administrative steps necessary to do so, but LFAs that demonstrate a lack of Effective Competition will continue to be able to provide regulatory safeguards. Furthermore, other franchising authority abilities, including the collection of franchise fees, negotiation or oversight of PEG channels and I-Nets, or creation and enforcement of customer service requirements, will not be affected.

Several commenters have suggested that this Commission action will result in the elimination of the basic service tier of programming, resulting in higher prices for price-sensitive cable customers.³ However, there has been no evidence in this proceeding to suggest that our previous findings of Effective Competition in thousands of communities led to any changes in the tier placement of local broadcast stations. Effective Competition has been declared in large Colorado cities, such as Colorado Springs, as well as small towns such as Log Lane, but none of the cable systems serving these communities have removed the basic service tier.

The initiatives that I have put forth at the Commission indicate my strong support for maintaining and improving affordable programming options. The recently adopted item does nothing to undermine these goals. Instead, it provides the specific relief requested by Congress and acknowledges the response in the video marketplace to the aims of the 1992 Act.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", is written over a horizontal line.

Tom Wheeler

³ See, e.g., Letter from Erin L. Dozier, Senior Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Legal and Regulatory Affairs, NAB, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC (May 15, 2015). See also Letter from Public Knowledge *et al.* to The Honorable Tom Wheeler *et al.* (May 26, 2015).