

I am writing to express my strong disapproval of any relaxation or elimination of the public interest limits on media ownership and effective cable TV franchising on the local level. Localism and diversity are the cornerstones of a democratic media system, and we cannot afford to compromise them in any way.

Let me cite several examples of the values of locally based and controlled media and what's happened to these outlets in my town.

Some years ago, WPNH AM & FM radio had its studio in downtown Plymouth (population ±6,000) and had local ownership. This station along with our weekly newspaper were the venues of local communication. School closing, special events, local election results were brought in and announced there. DJs were known to local people and were seen on Main Street. Interview shows were conducted by radio station personalities so local people could come in and talk about topics of interest to local folks. Local high school football games were carried live. Local businesses (big and small) would buy advertising on WPNH and promote their services and products. About 8-10 years ago the radio station was bought and the studio moved to a town 30 miles to the South. Satellite feed music and programming replaced most of the local qualities that town's folks so much valued in WPNH. WPNH still sells ads to local businesses, but the rest of what made it so much a part of our town is gone.

In 1992, cable access TV channel was started up on State Cable TV's system through the interest of local citizens in seeing locally produced video programming on their TVs. Thankfully, provisions permitting this were added (per FCC regs) to the franchise agreement between State Cable and the Town of Plymouth. Since then, a second channel has been added (dedicated to governmental programming), towns receiving local access programming have grown from 2 to 10, staffing has grown from several volunteers to one full-time staff member and many volunteers, and the franchise fee grew from 0% to 5% -- all of which is passed-through to cable TV subscribers. The access channels are very popular for their local video content and the locally produced slides running when no video is running. The video programming that seems particularly interwoven into the fabric of the community is live coverage of Selectboard, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Adjustment meetings. In November, liv

e video coverage is expected to commence for Plymouth School Board meetings. We are exploring webcasting much of channels' video content to be accessible online. The current regulations of the FCC Re: local franchising has fostered this very beneficial application of media technology to local needs and abilities to pay.

Last December, however, we learned that the FCC relaxed franchising rules for new telecom entrants into the cable TV industry such that local people will have less say in negotiations with telecom video providers for franchises. Local prerogatives will likely be diminished or cut out altogether. Now we

hear that these same privileges given to telecoms last December will be granted by the FCC to cable TV providers. If local communities are in effect disenfranchised and compelled to bend to industry profit models which are protected by these new regulations, our local community life will be saddened, as it was with the departure of local AM/FM radio.

An FCC vote against media consolidation and for local community franchising is a vote for democracy. Please let me know how you vote and why you voted so.