

Access Sacramento supports community media groups in a nationwide coalition of municipalities and regional organizations today in filing with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) charging that telecom giant AT&T discriminates against local public channels with its U-verse cable TV system. Locally, we join with the Sacramento Metropolitan Cable Television Commission (SMCTC). in support of this Petition.

Relegating local, non-profit media channels to second-class status is a disservice to the public and violates both the spirit and letter of the law. AT&T's treatment of PEG channels is inferior in virtually every way that matters to a viewer, preventing the public's ability to easily access safety alerts, health information, town hall meetings, educational and other local programming.

AT&T's U-Verse plan in California and nineteen others States makes finding the local public, educational, and government channels almost impossible and is designed to disconnect PEG channels from their viewing audience. Currently in Sacramento County, AT&T U-Verse does not carry the seven PEG channels seen on Comcast and SureWest cable systems including Access Sacramento Channels 17 and 18. The local delay in carrying these important Sacramento County PEG channels and the inferior means of viewing the channels once connected to "channel 99", adds local urgency to this important national initiative."

In Sacramento County, wherever AT&T is providing video programming, its U-Verse system removes local PEG channels from the standard lineup, dumping dozens of channels into a generic "Channel 99" web site – stripping away individual channel identities and depriving those channels of basic functions viewers have come to expect.

AT&T subscribers cannot simply tune in the Sacramento City Council meeting or Sacramento State distance learning class or the 35th Annual "Pig Bowl" as they can on Comcast and SureWest. Viewers can't switch between commercial and PEG channels, set a DVR to record a PEG program, or depend on getting timely local emergency alerts or closed captioned programming.

In an independent report released September 2008, the Congressional Research Service agreed that, "AT&T has chosen not to make PEG programming available to subscribers in the same fashion that it makes commercial programming available."

"AT&T, the company that promotes competition and choice, is giving the public no choice when it comes to accessing local information that isn't readily available on other channels," said Rob Brading, President of the Alliance for Communications Democracy, a national group that defends the public's right to speak via cable television.

The filing follows a sternly worded bi-partisan letter from Congress to the FCC in September saying that changes in the cable TV industry should not lead to second-class status for PEG channels.

"PEG television is essential to our communities as an outlet for free speech, local information and

opinions, and emergency communications," said the Sept. 30, 2008, letter signed by Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY), the Chair of the House Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, ranking member Rep. Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) and Appropriations Chair David R. Obey (D-WI.)

Access Sacramento asks the FCC to rule that AT&T's PEG product unlawfully discriminates against PEG programming in violation of the 1984 Cable Act and Commission rulings and policies.

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