

Access Humboldt

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FCC PETITION CHALLENGES DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LOCAL ACCESS CHANNELS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Access Humboldt joined with a nationwide coalition of community media groups, municipalities and regional organizations today to support the filing of a Petition for Declaratory Ruling with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) charging that telecom giant AT&T discriminates against local public, education and government (PEG) access channels.

“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,” said Helen Soule, Executive Director of the Alliance for Community Media (ACM), which represents local Public, Educational and Government (PEG) channels nationwide.

“AT&T’s treatment of PEG channels [in their U-Verse service] is inferior in virtually every way that matters to a viewer, preventing the public’s ability to easily access safety alerts, town hall meetings, educational and other local programming,” added Soule.

In states from California to Connecticut, 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” – stripping away individual channel identities and depriving those channels of basic functions viewers have come to expect.

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.”

“Today’s filing asserts the public interest in broadband media access and affirms our basic human rights of free expression and access to information,” said Sean McLaughlin, executive director of Access Humboldt and a Board member 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-OH) and Appropriations Chair David R. Obey (D-WI).

Today’s Petition 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.

Petitioners include community-based PEG centers (like Access Humboldt), cities, regional and national organizations from around the country dedicated to assuring that PEG channels and services are accessible to local residents, neighborhood groups, high schools, colleges, churches, civic groups and nonprofit organizations.

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"Local Voices Through Community Media
Engage – Connect – Educate"

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