

TENNESSEE CABLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

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PHONE GIANTS NOT SEEING SUCCESS ON FRANCHISING ISSUE

NASHVILLE – Thus far in 2007, the phone giants (specifically AT&T) have seen four failures and no successes in passing legislation that would give the companies shortcuts into the video business by dismantling local franchising process. In just the past few weeks, the legislation has been defeated in Colorado, Utah, Idaho and Washington.

“This is a sweetheart deal for AT&T and other big telephone companies but really bad policy for local governments, taxpayers and consumers. Dozens of companies play by rules that AT&T now wants to change to suit its pocket book. For that reason it is being defeated in state after state,” said Stacey Briggs, executive director of the Tennessee Cable Telecommunications Association.

“This year, similar bills that strip authority from local governments, eliminate standards for quality service and establish discrimination between ‘haves and have nots’ have not gotten a good reception from legislators in other states – and that’s exactly what’s happening to this bad idea,” she said.

These defeats coincide with the FCC ruling published on Monday, March 5 to speed license approval for video services through the local franchise agreement (LFA) process. This is a major development as it relates to AT&T’s effort in Tennessee (and other states) that is aimed at dismantling such a local system. The FCC action reaffirms the local franchise process and further ensures that AT&T would today have swift application and approval in any Tennessee city or county if it would simply apply to do business.

There are no exclusive cable franchises in Tennessee. AT&T or any other provider wanting to enter the business must simply apply with local governments to provide service within that municipality or county.

Both nationally and throughout the state of Tennessee, cities and counties are opposed to this legislation. Telecommunications Advocacy Coalition (TAC), a non-partisan coalition of national local government associations representing virtually all elected and appointed local officials in the United States, oppose the AT&T shortcut, and have developed a new website, www.thetruthontelecomreform.org to provide factual information to lawmakers about this issue. The coalition includes the National League of Cities (NLC), the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), and the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA). While they welcome competition – as does the cable industry – they do not want legislation approved that strips local governments of authority over consumer protections, rights of way and access to services.

In Tennessee, both the Tennessee Municipal League and Tennessee County Services Association oppose SB 1933 / HB 1421, known as the Competitive Cable and Video Services Act.

For more information, go to www.KeepItLocalTennessee.com.

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