

# T E N N E S S E E T R I B U N E

Tn Tribune Bldg., 1501 Jefferson Street, Nashville, TN 37208 • (615)321-3268

April 16, 2007

Dear Tennessee lawmaker:

I am writing to strongly oppose the video franchising legislation currently before the Tennessee House and Senate (SB 1933/ HB1421, inappropriately labeled the Competitive Cable and Video Services Act of 2007) that would eliminate local control of video franchising - a public policy that is essential to combating the digital divide, promoting private investment, and meeting the needs of the local community.

As the Publisher and Owner of the Tennessee Tribune, I believe it is important to inform and engage the public in this important debate. Each week, over 150,000 Tennesseans turn to the Tribune for news and information shaping their community - specifically the African-American community that is part and parcel of Tennessee's rich heritage and a foundation for our state's future. Recently, the Tribune ran an article discussing the pitfalls of the proposed legislation.

I am also the founder of the Nashville Black Chamber of Commerce, an organization of which I am a proud member for its advocacy on behalf of issues that promote small businesses in the Nashville community. I read with great concern that the National Black Chamber of Commerce had taken a position in support of this legislation that I believe would do great harm to our state's economic progress, particularly for rural, minority, urban and middle-class families. I disagree fiercely with my respected colleagues at the Chamber who seem to have lost their way at the behest of corporate interests in supporting a bill that would so significantly pervert civil rights principles for which we fought for decades.

Anti-discrimination provisions are an essential element in the cable, telephone, banking, insurance and housing industries alike in ensuring that the African-American community is protected from harms based solely on the color of their skin, their income, or the neighborhood in which they live. The rules not only protect families, but help facilitate small business creation and ensure that our entrepreneurs operate on a level playing field to compete with their peers for the American dream each of us shares. The local franchising rules represent perhaps the nation's only policy aimed at preventing discrimination in the provision of high-speed Internet and video networks, and they have helped facilitate billions in investments for all customers.

Nearly every consumer group, civic organization, and network operator that has lived and breathed within these rules believe them to be reasonable and welcoming for new competitors. In other states where the telephone companies have chosen to compete on equal terms, they have asked for and received local franchises with such little trouble that their executives have commented that "franchising is not holding us back."

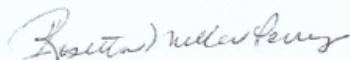
Startlingly, the largest telephone company in the United States now claims that anti-discrimination rules are more than it can stand, so it suggests that we give them up in return for promises of investments and lower monthly cable bills. Yet these promises have not withstood the sunlight of experience - already video prices have gone up in communities around the country and their executives have adamantly refused to compete with cable companies in a "price war" for consumers. With significant competition from numerous sources for our cable dollars, there is little reason to forgo essential consumer protections for a little added competition.

Under the proposed video franchising legislation, low-income communities and their elected leaders would be at the complete mercy of executives regarding the deployment of broadband services that, every day, become more and more of an essential ingredient for education, commerce and financial success. AT&T would be free to choose its service territory, carving up cities into haves and have-nots with no input from the public's leaders. It could deploy new fiber-optic lines to only Belle Meade neighborhood and never serve Edgehill so long as it did not discriminate within the area of Belle Meade - truly a policy that could encourage more division that it prevents.

This would truly be a sad situation for Nashville's African-American community - and indeed the hard-working families throughout the state that do not meet AT&T's definition of "high value" customers - if it were to take shape. We understand the state's interest in promoting competition and welcome that competition so long as we ensure that African-Americans are able to take part in what it brings.

We hope you will fight to oppose this legislation.

Sincerely,



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