

# TENNESSEE TRIBUNE

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## The Tennessee Tribune is strongly opposed to the video franchising



Nashville, TN--The Tennessee Tribune strongly opposes the video franchising legislation currently before the Tennessee House and Senate (SB1933/HB1421, inappropriately labeled Competitive Cable and Video Services Act of 2007). The Tennessee Tribune says that if this legislation passes, it would eliminate local control of video franchising -- a public policy that is essential to combining the digital divide, promoting private investment, and meeting the needs of the lo-

cal community. This newspaper recently ran an article discussing the pitfalls of this proposed legislations (February 22, 2007).

Rosetta Miller Perry, the publisher and CEO of the Tennessee Tribune, stated that it is important for this newspaper to inform and engage the public about this important debate.

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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.

Miller Perry the founder of the Nashville Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC), an organization of which she is most proud to be a member of stated that The NBCC is known for its advocacy on behalf of issues that promote small businesses in the Nashville community. She also said she had grave concerns that the National Black Chamber of Commerce had taken a position in support of this legislation that Miller Perry believe will do great harm to Tennessee’s economic progress, particularly for rural, minority, urban and middle-class families. She disagree fiercely with her respected colleagues at the National Chamber, who seem to have lost their way at the behest of corporate interests by 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 house industries alike, in ensuring that the African American community is protected from harms based solely on the color of our skin, income or the neighborhood in which we live. The rules not only protect families, but also 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 that each of us shares. The local franchising rules represents 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. 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 forego 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 ser-

vices that are daily becoming 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 also deploy new fiber-optic lines to only the 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 than it prevents.

If this bill takes shape, 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. 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 pray that the readers and subscribers of the Tennessee Tribune newspaper will fight to oppose this legislation.