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Mary Cardona
(608) 215-5594
exec@
wisconsincommunitymedia.com

November 30, 2023

Congressman Glenn Grothman
c/o Timothy Svoboda
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Grothman,

I am writing today about [H. R. 3557](#), the “American Broadband Deployment Act of 2023.” We ask that you oppose this bill when it comes to the floor of the House.

Proponents claim the purpose of H. R. 3557 is to hasten broadband rollout, but the long-lasting consequence of this bill will be to dangerously erode the ability of communities to control their rights-of-way and to overturn long-standing federal law that enables local governments to enter into negotiated cable television franchise agreements with video service providers. Thousands of communities across the country rely on the franchise process to hold telecom companies accountable.

Wisconsin Community Media knows something about local cable television franchising and what happens when you lose it. We don’t want this to happen in other states. 2007 Wisconsin Act 42 ended all cable franchise agreements negotiated between municipalities and cable operators and replaced these agreements with statutory language that gives two state agencies little power to enforce the act’s weak provisions. Municipalities can only complain when service is poor and hope video service providers (VSPs) will be responsive. Local governments with PEG access channels often struggle mightily to get action on outages and resolve reception problems. Getting the major provider of video service in the state (Charter Spectrum) to modernize how PEG channels are carried is a battle we have been waging for years to no avail. Dozens of PEG channels are now dark, and while the cause for this varies, a big factor for many municipalities has been frustration with their VSP.

H. R. 3557 would have local cable TV franchises “continue in effect (without any requirement for renewal)” until either the company or the municipality decide to terminate it. It ends typical 10- or 15-year agreements during which franchise terms are honored, and modifications are negotiated. And it ends the renewal

process that gives municipalities some leverage to ensure a company is keeping up with technology, maintaining its plant, and serving community needs.

Alarming under H. R. 3557, a company could unilaterally make changes to a cable franchise agreement for “good cause” with a simple written notice to the municipality. Local governments would be stripped of any leverage they now have with these mostly large national corporations. Wisconsin municipalities well know this is not a good idea.

Although Wisconsin municipalities long ago lost control over cable video service, our communities still retain a lot of control over their rights-of-way. There are several right-of-way powers that are at risk in H. R. 3557. WCM believes that local governments should have a say over wireless siting. It is appropriate for local governments to have the power to enforce public safety and zoning ordinances. Local governments should be able to assess fees in line with current FCC rules and safe harbor pricing. Local officials should not have to travel to Washington D. C. to defend their decisions before the FCC.

Please help Wisconsin municipalities keep that local control and allow other states that still have local cable franchising to keep it by opposing H. R. 3557. The U. S. Conference of Mayors said it well in its [resolution in opposition to the bill](#): The proposed bill would bestow on broadband providers an unprecedented federal grant of access to state and local public property but impose no obligations on those providers to serve “unserved” and “underserved” Americans.

With your “no” vote, you’ll be saying you respect the right of local governments to hold telecommunications and cable companies accountable on behalf of the residents they serve. You will be preserving local power and recognizing the truth of the matter – that municipalities are doing their utmost to bring high speed broadband to their communities, and they are eagerly collaborating with telecommunications and cable companies because their local economic health depends on it.

Sincerely,



Mary Cardona
Executive Director
Wisconsin Community Media
<https://wisconsincommunitymedia.com>

cc: League of Wisconsin Municipalities; WCM Members; Alliance for Community Media

About Wisconsin Community Media (WCM). The 52 media center members of WCM are managed by local governments, school districts, colleges, and non-profit organizations for the benefit of our local communities. Our members also include independent producers who want their work seen throughout the state. We have united to collaborate, educate, advocate, and share resources to build strong media centers and create responsive local programming for Wisconsin communities. We encourage the creation of local non-profit media production and distribution facilities where “everyday” people can produce programs about subjects that matter to them and to their communities.

WCM Member Media Centers in the 6th District are: City of Columbus, Howards Grove Community Cable TV, City of Portage, Oshkosh Media, City of Ripon, City of Sheboygan - WSCS, and Plymouth Community Television.