

ACTION ALERT



Independent Programmers: "Horror stories" Needed! Has the Cable Industry Discriminated Against You?

The FCC has opened a proceeding to reexamine how many cable systems any one company may be allowed to own. Unless a case is made for strong limitations, the nation may be left with two companies operating most of our nation's cable systems, thereby making it even harder for independent programmers to obtain distribution.

Media Access Project needs your help keep programming open to independents.

The 1992 Cable Act requires the FCC to set a limit on how many cable systems a single company could own. Congress reasoned that if only a few companies owned all the cable systems in the United States, these companies would become "media gatekeepers," controlling what Americans can hear, see and say.

Although the law is now 9 years old, it has not been enforced. Although the FCC finally issued rules capping ownership at 30 per cent of the nation's homes, a federal court threw them out, purportedly because the FCC did not have enough evidence to justify the 30 per cent limit. (Never mind that when the law was passed, the largest cable company controlled less than 25% percent of the cable systems, and the top ten companies controlled less than 50% of the cable systems. Today, AT&T owns all or part of about half of the cable systems and AOL/Time has about 30 per cent.)

MAP needs to collect proof that will satisfy the FCC. It needs "horror stories" from programmers, particularly where you have dealt with one of the larger cable companies, or where a local cable company started acting different after a larger company bought it. MAP can keep information confidential, if you so request. MAP is especially interested in hearing from independent content producers, those using public access channels, and local franchising authorities.

The FCC has set a deadline of January 4, 2002, for comments. So that we may include your experiences can be in the comments, please send your stories by December 16, 2001.

Thanks.

Please send questions or information to:

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