

media reform

# ACTION GUIDE

TOOLS, TIPS AND  
TECHNIQUES  
FOR PROMOTING  
CHANGE



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# MEDIA REFORM ACTION GUIDE

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⊙ **Easy Targets.** These actions are great ways for someone new to media reform to get involved and make a difference.

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 **Easy Targets.** These actions are great ways for someone new to media reform to get involved and make a difference.



Dear Friends,

This Media Reform Action Guide is your invitation to rise up, take to the phones, the Internet and the streets to build a better media system.

Each chapter in this guide will help make your voice heard on the media issues that matter to you. Whether you're motivated to fight for a free and open Internet, for diverse media ownership, or for vibrant public and independent media, this guide is for you.

The Media Reform Action Guide provides valuable, step-by-step information on everything from raising awareness and monitoring your local media to advocating for national policy changes. It will help you make an impact – and connect you to other activists and to a powerful movement for better media.

So use it. Share it with your friends. Put it to work for you.

You are essential to the success of the movement for media reform in the United States. This guide will help you remake the media.

*Thanks for all you do,*  
Your allies at Free Press

P.S. Don't forget to visit [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net) for more information, resources and actions.

## CHAPTER 1

# Raise Awareness

Because we can't rely on the media to educate us about their own failings — much less correct them — motivated citizens must use every available channel of communication.

One of the most important things you can do to raise awareness is to share your understanding of media problems and solutions with others.

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## Send a Letter to the Editor

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** are among the most widely read sections of the newspaper. Many members of Congress scan these letters to gauge their constituents' interests and opinions. Here's how you can increase the likelihood that your letter will be printed:

**Check the specifications.** Length and format requirements vary from newspaper to newspaper. Specifications are often printed on the editorial page, or you can check the paper's Web site or call the paper to ask. Find out the best way to send your letter— by mail, fax, or e-mail. Read the letters to the editor published in your paper to get ideas on successful style, format, etc.

**Make it timely.** You might refer to a recent story where the media ignored or mishandled a critical issue, or to a timely media policy issue. You could also respond directly to a story recently printed in the paper.

**Make it local.** Whatever you're writing about, relate it to local issues and talk about how it will affect your community. For instance, you could refer to your local legislator's position on an issue or refer to a local media outlet.

**Know your subject.** Stick to the facts — don't make false or misleading statements.

**Keep the tone reasonable.** Use humor, irony, or even a hint of anger, but don't be nasty or offensive.

**Keep it brief.** Try to make just one point in your letter. State the point clearly in your topic paragraph, followed by one or two paragraphs and a conclusion. 200 words is a typical limit. Letters that are too long will either be edited down or not printed at all.

**Make it easy.** Include your full name, address, daytime phone number and e-mail address. Without this information, your letter may not be printed.

**See page 56 for a sample letter to the editor you can tailor and submit to your local paper.**

## Publish an Op-Ed, Guest Column or Newsletter Article

Seek out venues to publish an opinion or commentary article that advocates for media reform. Many daily and weekly newspapers publish submitted articles in a “guest column” or accept op-ed submissions. (An op-ed is a brief essay that expresses a personal viewpoint, usually located on the page opposite the editorial page).

Alternative papers, magazines and news Web sites often accept and publish submissions as well. Or submit to an organization’s newsletter; they might welcome an article that makes the connection between their primary issue and media reform.

Here are some tips on writing and publishing an op-ed:

**Advocate.** An op-ed is an opportunity to strongly state your position on an issue. You should do so emphatically but thoughtfully. Be timely and passionate but not outrageous. You are trying to convince a mainstream audience to adopt your position.

**Inform.** Base your arguments on facts and first-hand information.

**Write with verve.** Use humor or emotion where appropriate. Employ anecdotes or personal accounts. Choose clear, direct, powerful language. An engaging and well-written op-ed is much more likely to be published than a dry critique.



### Resource

To find contact information for newspapers and other media, use the online database at [www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/media](http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/media). Just type in a zip code to get information for media outlets in a particular area.



**Use your professional affiliation** or other title that suggests authority or shows your stake in the issue. If you work for an organization, get permission to sign your op-ed as a representative of that group.

**Submit your piece** after contacting the paper about their specifications.

Length requirements are usually around 600 words. Some newspapers will not accept articles that have been submitted to other publications. Include a brief cover letter to the editor outlining your article. Include your contact information and a brief bio.

For a guest column, article or newsletter commentary, you can use the same general writing tips above, but take a look at other stories in that publication to get a sense of the outlet's typical style and tone. Contact the publication's staff for information about how to submit an article.

**See page 57 for a sample op-ed you can tailor and submit to your local paper. Go to page 59 for a sample organizational newsletter article.**



## Write or Comment on Blogs

The Internet is a much more democratic communications medium than traditional media like newspapers and TV. Blogs offer an opportunity for anybody to easily publish their ideas, and provide forums for others to comment and respond. With an interesting message, an engaging tone, and some smart promotion, you can get a good audience for your media reform message.

**Find a forum.** Either post to a blog that accepts reader submissions or get a discussion going in the comments section of a widely read blog. You can also start your own blog; a quick Web search will turn up many free platforms. This is a great way to chronicle what's happening in your community, especially if the traditional media isn't covering it.

**Use brief paragraphs.** Long sentences and paragraphs can be intimidating and hard to read on a screen. Even when making a long point, paragraphs should be no longer than a couple of sentences.

**Make it snappy.** People are more likely to read your post, comment on it, or forward it to others if you can state your message in a funny, wry, or especially engaging way.

**Provide links.** Blogs are good places to alert people to further information elsewhere. Write a quick, compelling post and link it to further information or action alerts on a site like [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net), [www.stopbigmedia.com](http://www.stopbigmedia.com), or [www.savetheinternet.com](http://www.savetheinternet.com). If you link to the work of other bloggers whom you like, they are more likely to link to you.

**Comment often.** A blog is a community. Many people read the same blogs each day or week. They begin to recognize the names of people who comment frequently. Readers will look out for commentators whose perspective they appreciate.



### Resource

To find relevant blogs, try [www.Technorati.com](http://www.Technorati.com). It's a web site that tracks and categorizes millions of blogs and provides resources for bloggers. Or look at the "blog roll" on blogs you enjoy to see which blogs those writers are also reading.

## Make a Video

Video recording and editing equipment has become less expensive and more accessible. With the proliferation of online channels for video distribution like YouTube, many activists are speaking to people across the country through their brief, homemade video missives.

**Get the right equipment.** Make sure your video camera is digital accessible. You can also use most webcams; one may even be built into your computer.

**Start with a plan.** Determine the main point you want to make. Select the appropriate audience you want to convince. Choose a format: Story? Interview? Talking head? Cartoon?

**Choose your distribution plan.** The easiest option is to make a brief video and distribute it yourself online. You can also work with a local public access channel to get longer videos on TV. Some commercial networks, such as Current TV, accept video content submissions from viewers.

**Be creative.** On the Internet, the more outlandish a video is, the more likely people are to watch it. Consider using a funny story line to explain why media reform is important to you. But simply sitting in front of your camera and making an impassioned plea may also draw attention.

**Choose the right length.** Most people's attention spans are short. For online distribution, aim to get your point across in a 60-second to five-minute video. But the shorter the better: People move quickly from one thing to another on the Web. For public access or other TV, you can aim for a standard 30-minute or 60-minute program.

**Post it to the Web.** Web sites like YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)), BlipTV ([www.blip.tv](http://www.blip.tv)) and Photobucket ([www.photobucket.com](http://www.photobucket.com)) will "host" your video. These sites will create a link to your video that you can post on your own Web site.

**Promote it.** If you've gone to all the trouble to make a video about media reform, make sure people see it! Send the link to all your friends; link to it in blog posts; post it on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace.



### Resource

Get tips on video production and distribution at Media Rights, [www.mediarights.org](http://www.mediarights.org). VideoMaker.com also has a good, concise guide to online video production at [www.videomaker.com/youtube](http://www.videomaker.com/youtube).

## Sticker the Message Around Town

Free Press's static-cling warning stickers (see below) are a great way to take media reform to the streets. They're thought-provoking, attention-grabbing, and totally legal — they don't use glue or adhesives, so they won't destroy property.

Places to sticker:

- ✦ Newspaper boxes
- ✦ TVs at your local “big box” store (Best Buy, Circuit City, Target, etc.)
- ✦ Outdoor advertisements for media (at bus stops, on subways and buses, etc.)
- ✦ TVs in public areas such as bus stations, laundromats or doctors' offices.

To order stickers, see [www.freepress.net/tools](http://www.freepress.net/tools) or call us at 877-888-1533.



### Be Bold!

A media reformer stickering TVs at a Best Buy store was caught in the act by a clerk — but after she explained the need for media reform, the clerk allowed the stickers to stay!

## WARNING

This device may dispense corporate media that lacks the diversity, skepticism and alternative points of view required by democracy.

[www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)

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## Host a Media Reform House Party

House parties are a great way to share your interest in media reform with your friends and neighbors. Invite a speaker or show a video as the party's centerpiece. You can go to [www.freepress.net/newsroom/videos](http://www.freepress.net/newsroom/videos) for clips and short videos about media reform.

**Invite people.** You can either invite people you know or open the event to the public. If it's an open event, publicize it in your local paper, post fliers around town, send an announcement out via e-mail or advertise the event with local organizations. Include a phone number or e-mail address for questions. Request an RSVP if space is a concern.

### Provide informational handouts.

Download resources to give to guests at [www.freepress.net/tools](http://www.freepress.net/tools) or order by calling 1-877-888-1533. News articles can also be useful.

**Provide snacks** or ask guests to bring some.

**Play host.** Once most people have arrived, ask everybody to introduce themselves to the group. Pass around a sign-up sheet to collect contact information. Once the videos or presentation is over, facilitate a discussion about the issues addressed.

**Identify next steps.** Encourage participants to visit the Free Press Web site ([www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)) and sign up to receive our e-activist alerts via e-mail. Identify a follow-up action you'd be willing to organize, like a letter-writing campaign (see page 34), a phone or e-mail action, or a meeting with your elected officials (see page 20).

Most importantly, have fun!



### Tip

House parties don't have to take place at your house — you can organize a presentation at a library, coffee house, community center, or local church.

## Give a Presentation About Media Reform

**All kinds of organizations**, from neighborhood groups and local political parties to PTA and church committees, might be interested in learning about media reform.

**Contact the group's leadership** to see if they'd allow you to give a brief presentation about media reform during an upcoming meeting.

### **Explain the connection between media reform and other issues:**

Media reform is crucial not just for creating better news and entertainment, but to advancing every issue you care about. That's because real progress on other issues – like the environment, civil rights, women's rights, social justice – is impossible unless we first fix our broken media system. Until we reform the media, these issues won't get the news coverage they need and the media attention they deserve.

**Set a date and publicize** the presentation to group members through an e-mail, blog posting, announcement at a meeting, or newsletter blurb.

**Prepare your presentation.** Use the talking points provided on page 61 of this guide. (Don't hesitate to change the words to better fit your speaking style.) Practice delivering your talk out loud before you give it. Also remember to bring some informational handouts for your audience. Free Press has resources you can download for free at [www.freepress.net/tools](http://www.freepress.net/tools).

**Always have a "take-away" action** that the group can do. Urge participants to contact their members of Congress about pressing media issues or take another action that will motivate further involvement.

This will provide you with a reason to follow up with them and a way to maintain a relationship. You can also encourage participants to sign up as e-activists at Free Press's Web site.



### **Not a Speaker?**

If you don't feel confident giving a presentation yourself, there are probably others in your community who might be able and willing to speak to your group, including:

- Professors from nearby universities' communications, journalism, political science or media studies departments
- Representatives of local independent media (community radio stations, public access stations, independent newspapers, etc.)
- Local politicians who have been outspoken about the need for media reform
- Representatives of local media reform groups

**Reach out to groups you are already involved with, such as:**

- ✦ Religious groups
- ✦ Local political parties/organizations
- ✦ Book clubs
- ✦ Student groups
- ✦ Labor unions
- ✦ Neighborhood associations
- ✦ Sports teams
- ✦ Senior citizen groups

You can also reach out to new groups that may be interested in media reform.

**See page 61 for sample talking points to guide your presentation.**

**Other Easy Ways to Raise Awareness**

- ✦ Add notes and links about media reform issues to your page on a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace.
- ✦ E-mail articles, Web site links, and e-petitions about media reform to your friends.
- ✦ Suggest that your book club read a book on media reform, such as Robert W. McChesney's *The Problem of the Media* or *Communication Revolution*.
- ✦ Ask teachers you know to include media reform and media literacy into their lessons.
- ✦ Post fliers, brochures and stickers around town.
- ✦ Give books, magazine subscriptions, and videos about media reform as gifts.
- ✦ Call in to radio talk shows and discuss media issues.

## CHAPTER 2

# Advocate for Policy Change

Since 1998, the communications industry has spent more than A BILLION dollars to influence Congress; that's more than \$100 million a year and twice as much as the oil and gas industry spent over the same time period — all in the name of pressuring Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to craft policies that benefit their bottom line. We need to fight back by pressuring policymakers to make rules that support the public interest, not the bank accounts of media moguls.

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## Who's in Charge

Congress and the Federal Communications Commission are the government bodies with the greatest oversight of media. Congress makes the laws, and the FCC writes and enforces the rules. They have the power to regulate media companies, and set the public policy agenda. Here is an overview of their respective roles in different areas of media policy.

	<b>Congress</b>	<b>The FCC</b>
<b>Content on radio and TV</b>	can pass laws requiring broadcasters to air certain kinds of public interest programming, such as educational programs or election coverage.	can fine TV and radio stations or revoke licenses if they don't follow the law — e.g., if they air obscene content or too little public interest programming.
<b>Media ownership</b>	makes laws on how much media one company can own and can overrule the FCC.	can make or change rules that govern how much of the broadcast media a single company can own.
<b>Public broadcasting</b>	can increase or decrease funding for public broadcasting. It can enact laws changing the way public broadcasting operates.	can grant, renew, or revoke public radio and TV stations' licenses. The agency can fine noncommercial stations for violating rules about advertising and content.
<b>Independent media</b>	can pass laws that allow more independent radio and TV stations to get on the air. It can allocate funds to subsidize independent media.	can issue recommendations to allow increased use of the public airwaves for noncommercial use.
<b>Advertising</b>	can pass laws limiting advertising on TV and radio as well as laws relating to political campaign ads.	can punish stations if they air too many ads during children's programming or fail to offer political candidates "equal opportunities" to air ads.
<b>The Internet</b>	can pass laws to protect the free flow of information online and set policies to promote competition and consumer choices.	sets standards for network management practices and fields complaints over the business practices of Internet service providers. It governs allocation of the public airwaves for mobile phones and wireless Internet access.



## Other Makers of Media Policy

Congress and the FCC aren't the only important actors in media policy, which is also made by the president, the courts, at the state and local level, and by other agencies.

### The Courts

- ✦ Judge whether FCC regulations meet congressional mandates.
- ✦ Decide the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress.
- ✦ Interpret First Amendment rights.

### The President

- ✦ Appoints FCC commissioners and directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which allocates congressional funds to public radio and TV stations.
- ✦ Sets policy goals for the FCC, proposes media-related budgets.
- ✦ Can veto legislation.

### State and Local Governments

- ✦ Decide which companies are allowed to provide cable and telecom services to a community.
- ✦ Negotiate contracts with cable companies that can provide public access TV channels.
- ✦ Can require cable or telecom companies to provide Internet access to schools, libraries and government buildings.
- ✦ Can create (or block) Community Internet projects providing high-speed Internet access through nonprofit or publicly owned networks.
- ✦ Can allocate funding for public broadcasting.
- ✦ Can allocate funding to subsidize independent media.

### Other Actors

The **Federal Trade Commission** and the **Justice Department** can stop a media company merger from taking place.

The **Federal Trade Commission** regulates the truthfulness of advertising.

The **Federal Election Commission** regulates political advertising.

The **IRS** can grant tax-exempt, nonprofit status to independent media organizations.

## How to Influence Federal Media Policy

**SAY THE WORD “POLICY”** and people often tune out. But public policy is vitally important, because it’s policy – especially federal policy made in Washington – that shapes our media system.

Don’t forget that policymakers are public officials, and it’s their job to serve the public interest. You have the opportunity to play a part in the policy process, and to have a say on the media issues you care about. Here’s how you can get involved:

### Call Your Members of Congress

When legislators hear from constituents on the issues that matter to them, it does influence their votes. Calling your representatives is also a great way to raise awareness about issues not currently on their radar – and it’s a great way to affect policy.

**Know what to expect.** You probably will not get a senator or representative on the phone, but you may talk to a staffer who deals with communications legislation. The important thing is making the call: Every office closely tracks all of their communication with constituents.

**Prepare for your call.** Feeling nervous is normal – just relax. It helps to write down what you want to say before you call. Talking points can be a good guide to organize your thoughts, but try to make your statement personal. Remember, your legislators are there to serve you.

**Identify yourself.** Give your name and what city or town you live in, and say you are a constituent. Most congressional offices will only respond to callers or letter writers who live in their state or district.



#### Get The Skinny On Your Elected Officials

You can get the name and phone numbers of your members of Congress by calling the Capitol switchboard in Washington: 1-800-839-5276.

At [www.freepress.net/policy\\_updates](http://www.freepress.net/policy_updates), you can find detailed information about specific media-related bills.

**Be brief and polite.** Explain the media issue you're calling about and summarize your position clearly. Keep it short and limit your call to one issue. Be direct but not argumentative.

**Be specific.** If you are calling about a specific piece of legislation, identify the name and number of the bill. For a comprehensive list of media-related legislation, go to [www.freepress.net/policy\\_updates](http://www.freepress.net/policy_updates). It's also OK to call without specific legislation in mind and ask instead about your legislator's position on a particular issue.

**Ask for an action.** Ask for a specific action on the part of your legislator: to vote for or against a particular bill, co-sponsor a bill, hold a hearing on an issue, or state a position on an issue. Mention that how they vote on media issues is a deciding factor in how you cast your vote.

**Don't get discouraged.** If you get a busy signal or can't get through, don't give up. Your legislators need your vote, so it's in their interest to listen to what you have to say and address your concerns.

**Share feedback.** If you learn anything about your legislators' positions, or have information to share, go to the Free Press Action Network and report about your experience; visit: [www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).



## Send Letters to Your Members of Congress

A letter to your elected representatives in Washington is a tried-and-true way to work for change.

**Use your own stationery.** Don't use your company or organization's letterhead unless the letter represents your company's formal position.

**Address elected officials by their official titles.** For senators and representatives, address the letter to "The Honorable [full name]."

The greeting of your letter should be "Dear Senator [last name]" for a senator and "Dear Congressman/woman [last name]" for a representative.

**Be brief.** A concise, one-page letter is more likely to be read. Stick to your point and be clear and concise.

**Use your own thoughts and words.** Although you can certainly use a form letter or talking points, it's better if you include your own thoughts and words in the letter or even write one from scratch. Reference a personal experience or talk about how the issue affects your community.

**Be clear on your position.** Write about only one issue. If you're writing about a specific bill, mention its number, name and principal sponsors. You can find this information at our Web site: [www.freepress.net/policy\\_updates](http://www.freepress.net/policy_updates).

**Request a specific action.** Ask your legislators to vote for/against a particular bill or amendment or to co-sponsor a bill. You can also ask your legislators to simply state their position on an issue.

**Include a return address.** Be sure to include a complete return address in your letter so that your legislator can send you a response.

**Mail the letter:** If you're writing a letter about media policy, send it to the legislator's Washington office.

**Let us know what you hear!** If you receive a response, please share it on the Free Press Action Network at [www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).

**See page 63 for a sample letter to your members of Congress that you can personalize and send.**

## Meet with Your Members of Congress

Most legislators are lobbied heavily by the media industry, so it's important for them to hear from their constituents, too. A face-to-face meeting between a member of Congress and a group of constituents lets elected officials know what issues people in their district care about.

**Plan carefully.** Assemble a small group of fellow constituents to organize the meeting with you and agree on one particular issue to address, such as media ownership, Net Neutrality, Low Power FM radio or public broadcasting. Try to schedule your meeting during a congressional recess, when your representatives are more likely to be around.

**Make an appointment.** Call the legislator's home district office nearest you (not the Washington, D.C. office) and ask for the name of the scheduler. Fax a written request for a meeting to the scheduler's attention. In your fax, be sure to include your name and contact information, note the issue you'd like to discuss during the meeting, and suggest a range of times that you can meet. Follow up with a call to the scheduler within a few hours of sending the fax.

**Prepare.** Agree upon a few key talking points and write them down. Find out how your legislator has voted in the past on the issue you will be addressing, and plan to note this during the meeting. Also prepare and make copies of fact sheets that you will bring with you to the meeting. Find fact sheets at [www.freepress.net/tools](http://www.freepress.net/tools).

**Expect a brief meeting.** Plan to have each participant in your group briefly make one important and unique point during the meeting. Leave time for the legislator or staffer to ask questions and respond to your request for action. Note that meetings with a legislator can be as short as 10-15 minutes, although meetings with legislative staff may be longer.

**Be polite, clear, and concise.** Tell the legislator how the issue affects you personally and provide facts and examples to support your argument. Don't be argumentative; keep the tone positive.



### Tip

Try to set up a meeting in your legislator's district office (rather than D.C. office) around holidays or during August. This is when legislators tend to be home in their districts, and their staff may have less pressing schedules. They'll be more likely to give you the time you deserve.

**Ask for a specific action.** For example, “Will you co-sponsor House bill 5353, The Internet Freedom Preservation Act?” Check [www.freepress.net/policy\\_updates](http://www.freepress.net/policy_updates) for current information on pending legislation. It’s OK if the legislator or staffer wants to get back to you later with an answer.

**Follow up.** Send a thank you note and watch for your legislator’s action on the issue. If they have made a commitment to you, make note of whether they follow through.

**Let us know how it went.** We’d love to hear about your meeting. Share your success stories or tactics with others. Blog about your experience on the Free Press Action Network at [www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).



### E-mails Do Work!

You may be tired of all the e-mail in your inbox, but e-mail can be a very effective way to communicate with your legislators, who often use e-mail to find out what issues are important to their constituents. E-mail is also a valuable way to register popular support for an issue.

## Sign or Start Petitions

Politicians need your vote to stay in office, and petitions are a valuable way to show your legislators that many votes are at stake on a given issue.

Sign petitions that are circulating on media reform issues or start your own.

- ✦ The success of petitions hinges on muscle and the messenger — the number of people signing and the credibility of the groups collecting signatures.
- ✦ Petitions are most effective when a group gathers the signatures and then delivers them in person as part of a visit to members of Congress. During the lobbying visit, the group presenting the petition will argue their position on the issue.
- ✦ Petitions should include printed names, full mailing addresses and e-mail addresses or signatures. Otherwise, the names on the petition may not be counted.

## Ask Candidates About Media Policy

Asking candidates for elected office about their positions on media policy helps put these crucial issues on the political agenda. It's important to let candidates know that we vote based on their stances on media issues.

- ✦ Ask questions about media policy through meetings with candidates or campaign staff, through candidate Web sites, or via a phone call or letter to the candidates.
- ✦ Ask a question during the Q&A portion of a campaign event. Get in line for the microphone early — even before the Q&A segment of the program begins.
- ✦ If you are volunteering for a campaign, candidates and their staff will take your questions and concern for media policy issues even more seriously.



### Tip

The committees that have power over media-related business in the Senate and House are:

- Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
- House Committee on Energy and Commerce.



## File Comments on FCC Rule Changes

Like other federal agencies, the Federal Communications Commission can't adopt new regulations without first notifying and seeking comment from the public. In the past, industry lobbyists often were the only ones who offered opinions. But media activists and motivated citizens from around the country have put the FCC on notice that the days of policymaking behind closed doors are over. By filing a comment in important proceedings, we can break the cycle of backroom policymaking.

Anyone can file, and comments from citizens describing their concerns, experiences, and desire for a better media system are highly important.

**To find a list of FCC rulemakings open for comment**, simply go to the FCC Web site, [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov). On the left-hand side is a "Filing Public Comments" section. Click on that, or go directly to the FCC's Electronic Comment Filing System page online at <http://gullfoss2.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload/>. This will provide a list of some of the more consumer-oriented rulemakings, with short descriptions of each.

**You can file a comment** online at <http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/ecfs/Upload/> or via mail. Comments sent via postal mail should be addressed to the FCC bureau that is handling the rulemaking docket and sent to that bureau's attention at 445 12th St., SW; Washington, D.C. 20554. To reach the FCC directly, call 1-888-CALL-FCC or e-mail them at [fccinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:fccinfo@fcc.gov) with questions. Remember to include the docket number and your contact information with any comment.

**You can also view comments submitted by others** on the FCC's Web site. Looking at other comments will set out the arguments being put forth by the media industry as well as by public interest groups and your fellow citizens. Go to this site: [http://gullfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/ecfs/comsrch\\_v2.cgi](http://gullfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/ecfs/comsrch_v2.cgi).



### The Easy Way to File

The Free Press Web site has an easy-to-use submission form designed to help people submit comments on certain important FCC proceedings. Check it out at [www.freepress.net/fcc\\_comment](http://www.freepress.net/fcc_comment).

## Attend a Public Hearing

The FCC occasionally holds public hearings to gather public input on a proposed rulemaking. Over the past several years, the FCC has held several hearings around the country, soliciting public testimony on media consolidation and Internet issues.

Public comments at these hearings are entered into the public record and considered as the FCC reviews its rules. If an FCC hearing comes to your area, be sure to attend and deliver your own brief comments.

You can also invite FCC commissioners or staff to come to your community for a hearing, conference or community meeting you arrange. E-mail the FCC at [fcinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:fcinfo@fcc.gov), call 1-888-CALL-FCC, or contact commissioners' offices directly (their information can be found at [www.fcc.gov](http://www.fcc.gov)).



### Tip

When the FCC wants to gather information on a broad subject, they issue a Notice of Inquiry (NOI).

If they want to change a rule, they release a document called a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM).

These notices assign a docket number to the proposed rules, explain any new regulations, and set a deadline for public comment. The FCC accepts public comments by mail, e-mail, online, and sometimes at public hearings.

For a fact sheet on the FCC's decision-making process, go to <http://ftp.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/knownoi.html>.

## The Power of Public Testimony

It's important for the FCC to hear in person from the people they represent. Below is a portion of the testimony of Gerardo Reyes Chavez, an organizer with Coalition of Immokalee Workers, given before the FCC at a media ownership hearing in Tampa, Fla., on April 30, 2007.

“Farmworkers often live in trailers, are often frightened but confused when storms move through – and they cannot understand the warnings coming their way on the radio, especially if they don't speak fluent English or Spanish. The smaller communities where farmworkers live, like Immokalee, lose detailed coverage in favor of larger markets. In 2003, we built our own Low Power FM community radio station, Radio Consciencia. ... While most workers have little access to the Internet, newspapers or television, Radio Consciencia gives Immokalee a voice and provides our community with the information it needs.

When Hurricane Wilma hit Immokalee in 2005 ... all local radio stations were transmitting alerts on the impending hurricane, but Radio Consciencia was the only radio station that was transmitting information on where to go and what to do in Spanish and in the indigenous languages spoken in our community. ... When people were confused about what was happening, they were able to contact us at the radio station to find out the current situation, the imperative of evacuating trailers, and where to find shelter. ... After the storm we saw that several of the trailers in the camps from which we evacuated people had been completely destroyed.”

## Examples of Citizen Comments Filed with the FCC

Comments to the FCC can range from a short sentence stating your opinion to an entire legal or technical briefing. Here are just a few examples of brief comments filed on various issues by citizens from across the country.

### **FCC Docket #07-52 (Net Neutrality):**

Net Neutrality is essential to free speech, equal opportunity and economic equity. ... The internet is driven by the people. Everybody has an equal shot of having their voices heard and their ideas shared and their products sold. A neutral Internet allows small-time blogging sites to compete with CNN for readers. A neutral Internet allows underground musicians to achieve a fan base before acquiring media fame. It is a neutral Internet that assures a Google search returns the results most relevant to your search query, not just the ones who paid the most money to big-time Internet providers. The idea of everybody having an equal opportunity to reach success is the very heart of the American Dream. And no other outlet has provided the means for achieving the American Dream quite like the Internet. Please protect the "first amendment" of the Internet and protect Net Neutrality.

– Ben S., Martinez, Ga.

### **FCC Docket # 03-202 (Rural Wireless):**

"Use of available spectrum in rural areas is a great idea! Care should be taken to ensure that the 'new' spectrum does not simply end up under control of huge companies (wireless, broadcasters, telephone companies) who will use it simply to prevent the public from having an 'alternative'. Licenses should be given to true local entities. ... I think that you'll see a lot of inventive uses and true public benefit if these ideas are followed. I have great hope for this initiative!"

– Joe T., San Diego, Calif.

### **FCC Docket # 02-277 (Media Ownership Rules):**

"The FCC was created to protect the public's interest for the public's airwaves. The original rules that limited media ownership were promulgated to insure diversity of opinion. Allowing the public airwaves to be consolidated under a few large corporate umbrellas will inevitably consolidate opinion & points of view. I do NOT and never will believe that fewer points of view will be good for a free press or a free people. I believe that by succumbing to the blandishments of large media corporations to change the rules of ownership, the FCC would be not only violating its charter to protect the public's interest but will also harm the public good."

– Andrea P., Rapid City, S.D.

### **FCC Docket # 02-153 (Spectrum):**

"The FCC is supposed to regulate the spectrum as a public trust and in the public interest. .... I would like to have additional support for creating and fostering community and LPFM stations. Noncommercial broadcasting should be subsidized with commercial licensing fees rather than, for example, giving away the digital television spectrum to the same corporations who have largely failed to offer programming that is educational, that provides information that aids in enriching and uplifting our communities, our families and our rapidly deteriorating democracy."

– Frederic N., Syracuse, N.Y.

## How to Affect Media Policy at the State and Local Levels

Although decisions on media policy are made primarily at the national level, state and local authorities wield considerable power on certain issues. In particular, negotiations with cable and phone companies – which control 99 percent of residential Internet access – take place at the state or local level.

### Contact State and Local Legislators

The same techniques that are useful in pressuring Congress can be even more effective in pressuring state legislators. Because state and local responsibility for media policy is often overlooked, state and local legislators may not hear much about media issues from local constituents.

But focusing on your state and local government can be a highly effective way to change media policy. In working with state government, it's helpful to find out which committees in your state's legislature deal with media issues, and if your state representatives or senators are on the relevant committees.



#### Issues at the State Level Include:

- Building broadband networks to provide high-speed Internet access to underserved communities
- Guaranteeing the right of municipalities to offer broadband services
- Determining whether cable TV franchise negotiations will happen at local or state levels
- Providing funding to public broadcasting stations
- Earmarking funds for independent media, minority-owned media, media literacy education, etc.

## Work with City Councils and Local Regulatory Boards

Your town, county or city council and local regulatory boards are good places to address concerns about the media in your community. Some ideas:

**Go to meetings.** Become a regular participant in your local government to find out what media-related issues the council (or county board) is dealing with, or to propose that the council pass ordinances or resolutions on issues important to you.

**Join a local regulatory board.** Local regulatory boards have the power to pass regulations that can have a real impact on local media policies. For instance, you could join your local cable board to help fight for a better deal with your community's cable provider.

### Get your town, city or state to pass a resolution for media reform.

Via resolutions, state and local governments can register disapproval of federal regulations and laws. Such resolutions against the FCC's loosening of media ownership rules were successfully passed in several communities. Resolutions can also indicate support for a principle like media diversity or Net Neutrality. You can also pass a resolution for media reform in your union or in other organizations in which you're already active.



#### Issues Addressed Locally Include:

- Promoting citywide initiatives to provide Internet access
- Negotiating cable franchise agreements (including cable rates, public access channels, etc.)
- Bringing media literacy curricula into schools

## Pressure Local Government for Better Cable TV

The cable TV service in your community may either be regulated by a state Public Utilities Commission or by a city or county agency (often called a “local franchising authority,” or LFA) that negotiates a contract with the cable company. The LFA allows the cable company to use public land and utility poles to lay their cable lines. In return, the cable company pays “franchise fees” and provides other services to the city.

Getting involved with your local cable franchise is often overlooked, but it’s an avenue for affecting policy change over a broad number of issues. With cable bringing television, broadband and phone service to homes (and with phone companies now getting into the cable TV business), local and state cable regulators have control over many media issues.

During the contract negotiations between your state or local government and the cable company (called “cable franchise renewal” negotiations), it’s possible for your local officials to negotiate for various provisions in the contract such as providing channels that regular citizens can use to air their own programs (public access channels); providing funds for studios, staff, and equipment to help citizens make their own media; and offering technology access to schools, libraries and local agencies.

However, many local franchising authorities fail to fight for strong community media provisions in the contract. You can help change that by pressuring your cable regulators to approve better contracts during cable franchise renewals. Here’s how to do it:

**Find out who regulates cable in your community.** Contact information for the Local Franchising Authority or Public Utilities Commission is probably printed on your cable bill. If it’s not, you can find out who is responsible for regulating your cable by calling your mayor or city council.

**Get a copy of the current cable franchise agreement.** The agreement may be available from the cable board, town hall or county board. Look through the agreement to see what kind of provisions your community receives from the cable company.

**Find out when the current franchise agreement expires.** This information should be noted on your copy of the franchise agreement. Negotiations around the renewal of the agreement can take anywhere from one to three years, so if the current agreement is set to expire within that timeframe, you should plan to get involved.

**Find allies in your community.** If there is a public access TV channel in your town, speak to the staff about advocating for better public interest provisions. You might also contact libraries, schools, community technology centers, and media activist groups. If no one in your community is working on cable issues, think about sparking interest and building a campaign yourself. This might include:

- Building a coalition of organizations and interested community members to pressure local authorities to negotiate a better cable agreement
- Researching the process of cable franchise renewal and the current situation in your community
- Determining your community’s “wish list” — what provisions your community needs to get from the cable company during franchise negotiations
- Trying to get yourself appointed to the board or commission that governs cable issues
- Making local franchising an election issue and pressuring the mayor, city council members, and local cable authorities to negotiate for the provisions your community wants

**Let us know what you’re doing.** If you have information that might be useful to others, please share it at the Free Press Action Network:

[www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).



### What You Can Get from Your Local Cable Franchise

- The cable company can be required to set aside a percentage of its channel capacity for community use. This channel capacity can be used to provide TV channels for public, educational, and government (PEG) programming.
- If the cable company also offers Internet service, it can be required to provide free or reduced-price Internet service to public schools, libraries, computer centers and other public facilities.
- The cable company can be required to pay five percent of its revenue to the local government in “franchise fees.”
- Franchise fees can provide funding for a community TV studio that the public can use to produce their own TV programs.
- Franchise fees can also fund programs that provide public access to computers and the Internet as well as training on how to use them.



## Philadelphia Promotes Media Diversity

In 2003, Philadelphia activists started a local campaign opposing the FCC's attempts to allow for more media consolidation. The Philadelphia activists' success sparked opposition to the rules in other municipalities and communities. Ultimately, the federal appeals court in Philadelphia tossed out the FCC's new rules altogether.

Below is the text of a resolution passed by the Philadelphia City Council.

### Resolution

Supporting diversity in media ownership by urging the Federal Communications Commission to protect and preserve its ban on cross-ownership of print and electronic media, and by urging the Congress to exercise its oversight in the area of federal communications policy by holding public hearings on media ownership issues, and by enacting legislation to prohibit further media consolidation.

*Whereas*, freedom of the press and public access to diverse media are prerequisites for a functioning democracy; and

*Whereas*, the broadcast airwaves are owned commonly by the public, and should be managed to serve the public interest; and

*Whereas*, the public interest is best served by the availability of a broadly diverse range of viewpoints; and

*Whereas*, media diversity is seriously threatened by further consolidation of media ownership in an already highly concentrated market; and

*Whereas*, deregulation of radio ownership rules under the Telecommunications Act caused unprecedented consolidation, dramatically decreasing competition; and

*Whereas*, the Federal Communications Commission is currently considering an unprecedented rollback of media ownership regulations, including but not limited to rules which forbid companies from owning newspapers and TV stations—or TV and radio stations — in the same media market, and rules barring firms from owning TV stations that reach more than 35 percent of the nation; and

*Whereas*, the elimination or weakening of these regulations would further reduce competition, local accountability, diversity of content and voices, and the amount and quality of news coverage in broadcast and print media across the country, while providing windfall profits for a small handful of corporate media owners; therefore,

*Resolved by the Council of the City of Philadelphia*, that it urges the Federal Communications Commission to protect and preserve its rules banning cross-ownership of electronic and print media, and regulations that limit the number of stations one owner may hold;

*Resolved further*, that the Council urges the Congress to exercise its oversight powers relating to federal communications policy through public hearings on media ownership issues, and to enact legislation prohibiting further media consolidation; and,

*Resolved further*, that a true and correct copy of this resolution be presented to all members of Philadelphia's congressional delegation as the true and sincere sentiments of this legislative body.

## Maine Stands Up for Net Neutrality

In 2007, Maine became the first state to pass state-level legislation on Net Neutrality – the fundamental principle that prevents Internet service providers from discriminating against Web sites and services. It all started with a group of local activists who pushed to pass a resolution, which helped to educate policymakers about Internet issues and gain their support. The text of that resolution is below.

### Resolution, Regarding Full, Fair and Nondiscriminatory Access to the Internet

**Preamble.** *Whereas*, the Legislature finds that the development and continued enhancement of advanced communications technology in the State is vital to economic development; and

*Whereas*, full, fair and nondiscriminatory access to the Internet is critical to the ability of Maine citizens to participate in the information economy and is an important element of citizens' access to information necessary to their roles as informed participants in our nation's democracy; and

*Whereas*, regulation of the Internet is generally viewed as principally a matter within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government; and

*Whereas*, the interests of the State of Maine and its citizens must be vigorously protected; now, therefore, be it

**Sec. 1. Monitoring state and federal activity relating to Internet access regulations.** *Resolved:* That the Office of the Public Advocate shall take the following actions to monitor and review state and federal activity on issues relating to full, fair and nondiscriminatory access to the Internet. The Office of the Public Advocate shall:

1. Evaluate the actions of the Federal Communications Commission, the United States Congress and other appropriate agencies of government with respect to ensuring that citizens' rights to full, fair and nondiscriminatory access to the Internet are not impeded;
2. Monitor the Federal Communications Commission's inquiry into broadband industry practices, FCC-07-31, WC Docket No. 07-52;
3. Collect information on legislative and regulatory actions of other states on these issues;
4. Review the State's telecommunications and technology policies, including the ConnectME Authority established pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 35-A, section 9203, and evaluate the extent to which those policies are encouraging adequate investment in technology infrastructure to support a strong Internet system and continued expansion of broadband access in this State; and
5. Review the extent of the State's authority to protect the rights of users of the Internet in the State to full, fair and nondiscriminatory access to the Internet; and be it further

**Sec. 2. Report.** *Resolved:* That, no later than February 1, 2008, the Office of the Public Advocate shall submit a report summarizing the results of its activities under section 1 to the Joint Standing Committee on Utilities and Energy.

## CHAPTER 3

# Challenge Your Local Media

If your media aren't living up to their public interest obligations, there are ways you can challenge them directly. Directly confronting your local media outlets can result in tangible changes to what you see or hear in your community's media.

.....

## Tell Media Outlets When You Don't Like What You're Getting

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU'RE SEEING** on TV, hearing on the radio, or reading in the newspaper, make sure your media outlets hear about it. Don't be shy about giving them some feedback.

### Launch a Targeted Campaign

A coordinated campaign may be more effective than a single complaint. It may succeed in pressuring media outlets to alter their news coverage, air a popular program, or make other changes. Join forces with others in your community and ramp up the pressure.

#### Determine your goals and targets.

You'll be more effective if you start with a precise goal (e.g., increasing coverage of local elections on Channel 5) than if you aim for broad changes in the media landscape.

**Gather support.** Reach out to friends, colleagues and local allies who share your concerns. Build a coalition of activists and organizations who are interested in the issue.

**Do some research.** Do community surveys or interviews, monitor your local media for coverage of certain issues, research the corporations that own your local media, or inspect a station's public files.

**Choose your tactics carefully.** Start with tactics that engage the media outlet in a dialogue, but plan to turn up the heat if you don't get a response. Tactics to consider might include:

- ✦ Coordinating a letter-writing campaign.
- ✦ Inviting a media outlet's management to meet with your group to discuss your concerns.



#### Resource

Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) has a media activist kit that provides information on detecting bias in the media and organizing campaigns for change. Check it out at: [www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html](http://www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html).

The Center for Media Justice conducted a successful campaign to challenge a San Francisco radio station's unfair treatment of issues important to youth of color. Read a report on their campaign at [http://action.centerformediajustice.org/sections/view/ymc\\_publications](http://action.centerformediajustice.org/sections/view/ymc_publications).

- ✦ Compiling a report outlining your concerns; include data to support your argument.
- ✦ Getting media coverage of your campaign. Write letters to the editor of local newspapers, place op-eds, call in to talk radio shows, etc.
- ✦ Raising public awareness by distributing fliers or leaflets.
- ✦ Holding a demonstration in front of the media organization's headquarters. Publicize the demonstration well to ensure good turnout.
- ✦ Boycotting companies that advertise on the media program or outlet you are targeting.

**Share information and success stories.** Tell us about your efforts at the Free Press Action Network: [www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).



## Children's Educational Programming

In exchange for their free use of the public airwaves, broadcast TV stations (but not cable networks) must air at least three hours per week of "core educational programming" for children.

However, TV stations themselves are allowed to define what is educational, a rule that can lead to the public being shortchanged. For example, Univision attempted to pass off "telenovelas" or soap operas to meet their three hours per week requirement, and other broadcasters have tried similar tactics to get around the rules. Univision's actions might have gone unnoticed had activists not checked their public files and notified the FCC.

The requirements for "core educational" programs include:

- The program must have education "as a significant purpose."
- The program must be aired between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.
- Advertising during the program must be limited to 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays.
- The educational objective of the program and the target child audience must be specified in writing in the children's programming report (a.k.a. the "FCC 398 report").

You can find out what your local stations are showing to satisfy "core ed" requirements by looking at their "FCC 398" reports on the Web. Go to: <http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/KidVid/public/report/10/query.faces> and enter the four-letter call sign for your TV station (e.g., 'WUSA' or 'KPIX').

## Report Violations of FCC Rules

Radio and TV stations must comply with FCC regulations. If you have evidence that a local station is breaking the rules, you can report them to the FCC. If the station is found to be in violation, they may be fined or could even have their license revoked. Some examples:

Stations can't broadcast **obscene material** at any time of day, or indecent or profane content during certain times of the day (generally when children are likely to be watching).

Stations can't accept **payment in exchange** for airing a particular program or song unless they explicitly disclose who paid for the content to be aired.

Broadcasters must **keep a "public file"** at the station containing documents that describe the station's community service. They must allow members of the public to inspect the public files at any time during normal business hours. (See the *Research* section of this guide for more information on the public file).

TV stations must air at least three hours per week of regularly scheduled **children's educational programming** between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. TV stations can't air more than 12 minutes per hour of **commercials during children's programs** on a weekday or 10.5 minutes on a weekend.



### Tip

Written complaints are especially good for TV and radio, because stations are required to keep written complaints in a public file. Contents of the public file can be used to evaluate the station's performance when its license comes up for renewal by the FCC.

## How to report violations

- ✦ To report violations of FCC rules, submit a complaint in writing to the FCC.
- ✦ Complaints should include the call letters and location of the station, a specific statement of the problem, and the name of anyone contacted at the station.
- ✦ If your complaint is about access to the public file (see below), also include the date, time, and address where you attempted to inspect the file, and the specific documents you were unable to view or obtain.
- ✦ If your complaint is about obscene programming, include a tape or transcript of the incident (or a very precise description).
- ✦ Mail your letter to:
 

FCC — Enforcement Bureau  
Investigations & Hearings Division  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554
- ✦ You can also e-mail complaints to: [complaints-enf@fcc.gov](mailto:complaints-enf@fcc.gov).



### What's 'Obscene'?

Congress and the courts have set out the following guidelines regarding obscene material:

"An average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the material, as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest"; "the material must depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by applicable law"; and "the material, taken as a whole, must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

Obscene content can't be aired on broadcast TV and radio. There are separate guidelines for indecent or profane material. For more information, see the FCC fact sheet on obscenity, indecency and profanity at: [www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/obscene.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/obscene.html).

## File Objections When TV and Radio Licenses Are Up for Renewal

TV and radio stations get broadcast licenses for free — on the condition that they serve the public interest. Every eight years, broadcasters have to submit a renewal, at which time citizens can object by filing comments with the FCC. If you're not happy with a local station's public service, you have only one chance every eight years to challenge its license.

Unfortunately, policy changes secured by broadcast industry lawyers and lobbyists have made it difficult to successfully challenge a station's license, and stations now get their licenses renewed with very little scrutiny from the FCC. Here's what you can do:

- ✦ **Find out when your TV and radio stations' licenses are up for renewal.** License renewal dates are the same for all stations in a particular state. See the chart on page 40 to find out when radio and TV station licenses expire in your state.
- ✦ **File an informal objection to a station's license renewal.** You also have the option to pursue a formal 'petition to deny' a license application. Formal petitions to deny carry certain legal requirements and are best undertaken with the assistance of a lawyer.
- ✦ **Plan to submit your comments two to four months before the license expires.** You can file informal objections anytime after the station submits its renewal application and before the FCC grants the renewal. You can find out about the status of your station's application through the FCC's Consolidated Database System (CDBS), available at: [http://gulfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/cdbs/pubacc/prod/cdbs\\_pa.htm](http://gulfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/cdbs/pubacc/prod/cdbs_pa.htm).



### Why Bother?

While it's rare that a station's license is revoked, it's still important to file comments to establish a record of a station's poor performance.

The more citizens who participate in the license renewal process, the more likely it is that changes to the system will be implemented.

License renewals also provide a good organizing opportunity for media activists. You can use the license renewal process as a chance to evaluate your broadcasters' public service and educate your community.



### Resource

Good sources for information and support around cable franchise renewal include the Alliance for Community Media ([www.ourchannels.org](http://www.ourchannels.org), 202-393-2650) and the Save Access Campaign ([www.saveaccess.org](http://www.saveaccess.org)).



- ✦ **State your objection in a letter to the FCC.** On the first page of the letter, include the station's call letters, city and state, the station's facility number, and the station's license renewal application file number. You can find this information in the FCC's Consolidated Database System, available at: [http://gulfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/cdbs/pubacc/prod/cdbs\\_pa.htm](http://gulfoss2.fcc.gov/prod/cdbs/pubacc/prod/cdbs_pa.htm).
- ✦ In the body of your letter, provide specific information about the station's performance and why it should have its license revoked. Point out specific issues of community concern that were not covered, other inadequacies in the station's programming, or any actions by the station that are not in the best interests of your community. Remember that the FCC doesn't monitor stations' programming, so any specifics you can provide will be useful.

**For radio stations,** address your letter to:

Audio Division,  
License Renewal Processing Team  
Mailstop 1800B  
FCC, Office of the Secretary  
445 12th St. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

**For TV stations,** address your letter to:

Video Division,  
License Renewal Processing Team  
Room 2-A665  
FCC, Office of the Secretary  
445 12th St. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

- ✦ Send a copy of your comments to the station's general manager to let them know you're watching. And share information that might be useful to other activists via the Free Press Action Network: [www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork).



## Resources

Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID) created a guidebook for residents of Grand Rapids, Mich., who challenged licenses in that community. It has information useful for other communities as well. See <http://www.mediamouse.org/griid/fcc.php>.

Local activists at Chicago Media Action teamed up with Media Access Project to file objections to the license renewals of stations in Chicago. You can read their petition to deny at: <http://www.mediaaccess.org/filings/ChicagoPetitionToDenyWithExhibits.pdf>.

The FCC has its own information sheet on participating in the license renewal process, available at: [http://www.fcc.gov/localism/renew\\_process\\_handout.doc](http://www.fcc.gov/localism/renew_process_handout.doc).

## Broadcast License Expiration Deadlines

Radio and TV licenses come up for renewal only once every eight years. Plan to file informal comments two to four months before licenses expire in your state. See the chart below or go to the FCC's Web site for the most up-to-date information: [www.fcc.gov/localism/renewals.html](http://www.fcc.gov/localism/renewals.html).

State	Radio	TV	State	Radio	TV
<b>Alabama</b>	Apr 2012	Apr 2013	<b>Montana</b>	Apr 2013	Apr 2014
<b>Alaska</b>	Feb 2014	Feb 2015	<b>Nebraska</b>	Jun 2013	Jun 2014
<b>Arizona</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014	<b>New Hampshire</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015
<b>Arkansas</b>	Jun 2012	Jun 2013	<b>Nevada</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014
<b>California</b>	Dec 2013	Dec 2014	<b>New Jersey</b>	Jun 2014	Jun 2015
<b>Colorado</b>	Apr 2013	Apr 2014	<b>New Mexico</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014
<b>Connecticut</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015	<b>New York</b>	Jun 2014	Jun 2015
<b>Delaware</b>	Aug 2014	Aug 2015	<b>North Carolina</b>	Dec 2011	Dec 2012
<b>D.C.</b>	Oct 2011	Oct 2012	<b>North Dakota</b>	Apr 2013	Apr 2014
<b>Florida</b>	Feb 2012	Feb 2013	<b>Ohio</b>	Oct 2012	Oct 2013
<b>Georgia</b>	Apr 2012	Apr 2013	<b>Oklahoma</b>	Jun 2013	Jun 2014
<b>Hawaii</b>	Feb 2014	Feb 2015	<b>Oregon</b>	Feb 2014	Feb 2015
<b>Idaho</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Aug 2014	Aug 2015
<b>Illinois</b>	Dec 2012	Dec 2013	<b>Puerto Rico</b>	Feb 2012	Feb 2013
<b>Indiana</b>	Aug 2012	Aug 2013	<b>Rhode Island</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015
<b>Iowa</b>	Feb 2013	Feb 2014	<b>South Carolina</b>	Dec 2011	Dec 2012
<b>Kansas</b>	Jun 2013	Jun 2014	<b>South Dakota</b>	Apr 2013	Apr 2014
<b>Kentucky</b>	Aug 2012	Aug 2013	<b>Tennessee</b>	Aug 2012	Aug 2013
<b>Louisiana</b>	Jun 2012	Jun 2013	<b>Texas</b>	Aug 2013	Aug 2014
<b>Maine</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015	<b>Utah</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014
<b>Maryland</b>	Oct 2011	Oct 2012	<b>Vermont</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Apr 2014	Apr 2015	<b>Virginia</b>	Oct 2011	Oct 2012
<b>Michigan</b>	Oct 2012	Oct 2013	<b>Washington</b>	Feb 2014	Feb 2015
<b>Minnesota</b>	Apr 2013	Apr 2014	<b>Wisconsin</b>	Dec 2012	Dec 2013
<b>Mississippi</b>	Jun 2012	Jun 2013	<b>West Virginia</b>	Oct 2011	Oct 2012
<b>Missouri</b>	Feb 2013	Feb 2014	<b>Wyoming</b>	Oct 2013	Oct 2014

## CHAPTER 4

# Become a Media Watchdog

If you feel that your local media aren't doing an adequate job of serving the public interest, the results of a research or monitoring project can help back up your claims. This is a good start to any campaign to pressure your local media to better serve your community.

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## Investigate Ownership

**O**WNERSHIP OF MEDIA OUTLETS is concentrated in the hands of a few giant conglomerates who control most of what we watch, hear and read every day.

Who owns the media serving your community? Here's how to find out:



### Resources

- Free Press has comprehensive media ownership charts with the most recent information on who owns what. Access the charts at: [www.stopbigmedia.com/chart.php](http://www.stopbigmedia.com/chart.php).
- The Center for Public Integrity's MediaTracker shows who owns the TV, radio, cable, and print media in your community — just type in your ZIP code. Check it out at: [www.openairwaves.org](http://www.openairwaves.org).

## Monitor Media Content

You may want to launch a project to monitor your media's representation of diverse communities, coverage of important public affairs, or corporate bias. There may be a research organization or professor in your community who could help develop a monitoring project. Two resources for monitoring projects are listed below.



### Resources

- Grade the News has developed a scorecard that can be used to grade local newscasts and analyze the results. Check it out online at: [www.gradethenews.org/feat/scoring.htm](http://www.gradethenews.org/feat/scoring.htm).
- FAIR provides useful tips on detecting bias in the news media at: [www.fair.org/activism/detect.html](http://www.fair.org/activism/detect.html).

## Inspect the Public Files

Local commercial stations make a fortune using the public airwaves. But what are you getting in return?

One way to find out is by investigating your local stations' "public files." FCC rules state that stations' public files must include information about station ownership, educational and community affairs programming, and public complaints.

Stations are required to show the public files to any citizen who shows up at the station and asks to see them. This is a great way to find out about your local media and to monitor whether they're meeting their public obligations. It's also a good first step in pressuring them for change.

Steps for inspecting a public file:

- ✦ Find out where your local stations are located via the Internet or the yellow pages.
- ✦ You may want to review (or bring along a copy of) the FCC's "The Public and Broadcasting" guide, which is available at: [www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/decdoc/public\\_and\\_broadcasting.html](http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/decdoc/public_and_broadcasting.html).



### What's the System Got to Do with It?

After inspecting your local stations' public files, you may find that they are making a lot of money off the airwaves and giving back little in return. This imbalance is largely due to lax policies that fail to hold stations accountable. Some questions to consider:

- Should there be a more rigorous renewal process for TV and radio station licenses? Should these licenses be reviewed more seriously before they are renewed every eight years? Should they be reviewed more often?
- Should there be more explicit rules about "public interest programming" and "treatment of community issues"?
- Should stations be required to air a certain amount of programming on local issues or more educational children's programming?
- Should they be required to air some shows that are produced by members of the local community?
- Should citizen surveys be required to determine what issues get covered?
- Should rules about who can own media in your community be more strict?
- Congress and the FCC can develop policies that make better, more accountable media a reality in our communities — but to do it, they need to hear from you.

- ♦ You can show up at a station any time during regular business hours and simply ask to see the public file; stations are required by the FCC to show it to you. However, it's a good idea to make an appointment in advance. When you call for an appointment, ask for the station's public affairs director. You don't have to explain why you want to see the file or mention your affiliation.
- ♦ Station staff will most likely be courteous and helpful. But if they're rude, unhelpful or unwilling to show you the file, take note.
- ♦ Also take note if the public file is incomplete; an incomplete file is a violation of FCC rules.
- ♦ Station staff (usually the public affairs director) will either take you directly to the files, or they may ask you which files you're looking for and bring those files to you. So it's important to know what you're looking for ahead of time (see "What to Look for in the Public File" on pages 46-47). Station staff may leave you alone with the files, or they may stay with you as you inspect the files.
- ♦ The public file will most likely consist of papers in file folders. However, if parts of the public file are on a computer database, the station must provide you with a computer terminal to look at them.
- ♦ You can either take detailed notes or request photocopies of all documents you're interested in. The station is required to make any photocopies that you request. They may make copies for free or may charge you a "fair price" (usually 10 or 25 cents per page). If you're asking for several copies, they may want to mail them to you later. The station must pay postage to send the photocopies and must send them within seven days.



**Tip**

In response to petitions from public interest advocates, the FCC passed an order in 2008 which will require broadcasters to improve their disclosure about how they're serving their communities. By the time you read this, you might be able to access this information on broadcasters' Web sites or on the FCC Web site.

## What to Do with the Information You Find

If you find information in the public file that is interesting or surprising, share it with community groups, local leaders, station owners and even the press to start a dialogue with your community about the media's obligation to the public.

Which company owns your station (and what else do they control)? What kinds of programs and information does the station think are most important to your community? What programs does the station cite to fulfill its educational programming requirement for children? How responsive has the station been to community concerns?

Use what you find to:

- ✦ Bring community awareness and/or press attention to broadcasters' public interest obligations.
- ✦ Start a dialogue with the station about how they can better serve your community. Think about developing a "citizens' agreement" with your broadcasters if there is not already one in place.
- ✦ Provide data and examples to the FCC and/or Congress that will encourage them to strengthen laws and rules that hold media accountable to the public.
- ✦ Discourage the FCC from renewing the station's broadcast license.



## What to Look for in the Public File

### Citizen Agreements

Stations must keep a copy of any written agreements they make with local viewers or listeners. These “citizen agreements” commonly deal with programming, employment or other issues of community concern.

- Does your station have any citizen agreements? Is it adhering to these agreements?

### Letters and E-Mail from the Public

Commercial stations must keep written comments and suggestions received from the public for at least three years.

- Is the station keeping all letters and e-mail from the public or just the positive ones? (If you know of a negative comment that was sent, you might check to see if it’s in the file).
- If there is consistent criticism from the public on a certain issue, did the station respond or ignore it?

### Material Relating to an FCC Investigation or Complaint

If the FCC is investigating a station or somebody has filed an FCC complaint, the station must keep related materials on file.

- Is the station being investigated for violating FCC rules?

### Time Brokerage Agreements

A “time brokerage agreement” (also known as a Local Marketing Agreement, or LMA) is a type of contract in which a station sells blocks of airtime to another company. The other company then provides the programming to fill that time block and sells the ads that run during the programming. (This is one of the deceptive ways that Big Media companies get around media ownership limits in local communities.) The station may also list this information in a “joint sales agreement.”

- Who else is supplying programs to this station? Is another station providing the news for this station to cut costs? Do these supply arrangements reduce the number of different sources of information in your community?

### Ownership Reports

The public file must contain a copy of the most recent complete “ownership report” filed for the station.

- If the station is a subsidiary of another company, who is the actual owner?
- Is there a “local marketing agreement” that allows another station to control some of this station’s programming?
- Does the file cite any other interests on the part of the station owners that might conflict with the public interest requirements of broadcasting?



## Issues/Programs Lists

Stations are required to keep a quarterly file of which local issues they covered and how they covered them. This information will usually be kept in separate files by issue (for instance, “public safety,” “environment,” etc.) with examples of when and how the issues appeared on the air (usually as part of local news segments).

- What local issues did the station cover? Are these issues representative of community concerns?
- Did some issues receive a great deal more coverage than others? What important issues are not being addressed?
- Are the issues that the station claims to be covering actually being covered adequately?
- Is important programming getting enough airtime? Is important programming on the air during primetime or only during times when nobody’s listening or watching?

## Political File

All candidates for public office must have equal access to broadcasting facilities. Also, stations must charge the lowest commercial rate available for political ads.

- Did the station provide more airtime to one candidate than another? Did it provide free airtime to one candidate but not another, or airtime at a reduced rate to one candidate but not another?
- How much did the ads cost?

## Employment Records

TV and radio stations must offer equal employment opportunity (EEO) and cannot discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or sex. Stations have to file reports on how they comply with these policies.

- How is the station recruiting candidates for open positions? Are they taking steps to recruit a staff that represents the diversity of your community?

## Children’s TV Programming Reports

Commercial TV stations are required by the FCC to air a minimum of three hours per week (between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.) of “core educational programming” specifically designed to educate and inform children and teens under 16. Stations must file “FCC 398” reports describing how their core educational programs have “education as a significant purpose.” Note that the stations themselves — not the FCC — decide what counts as educational programming.

- Does the station list at least three hours of educational programming for children? Is it regularly scheduled for the same time every week?
- What kind of programs does the station air to fulfill its “core education” requirement? Are these programs legitimately educational or are they just fluff entertainment?

## Advertising in Children’s Programming

There are limits on the amount and type of advertising in TV programs for children 12 and under. There cannot be more than 12 minutes of commercials per hour on weekdays and 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends.

- Did the station exceed ad time limits during children’s programming?

## CHAPTER 5

# Plug In

Our success in national and local battles will hinge on the strategic, coordinated actions of motivated citizens working together. The movement for better media needs you – activists, media makers, watchdogs and concerned citizens. It's up to all of us to demand better media. Plug in with established national organizations and local groups — or, if there's no local group in your community, consider starting your own!

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## Join National Advocacy Efforts

**F**REE PRESS and other national advocacy groups monitor media policy and then organize large numbers of people to pressure Congress, the FCC, and others at crucial times in the policymaking process. Working with these organizations is a great way to ensure your voice will be heard.

- ✦ If you haven't already done so, join the Free Press e-activist network to be notified of important developments and opportunities to take action. You can join by visiting [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net) – the sign-up appears in the upper left on every page.
- ✦ Ask your friends and colleagues to sign up, too!



### Examples of Local and Regional Media Activist Groups

There are some amazing grassroots media activist groups working with communities around the country. To highlight just a handful:

**Chicago Media Action** ([www.chicagomediaaction.org](http://www.chicagomediaaction.org), 1-866-260-7198) is an activist group dedicated to analyzing and broadening Chicago's mainstream media and to building the city's independent media.

**Mountain Area Information Network** ([www.main.nc.us](http://www.main.nc.us), 828-255-0182) is an organization working with communities in Western North Carolina to link media literacy with the concepts and practices of citizenship.

**People's Production House** ([www.peoplesproductionhouse.org](http://www.peoplesproductionhouse.org), 212-334-7433) is a media justice organization based in New York City. PPH aims to transform the media landscape through a unique mix of community organizing, education on media policy, and intensive journalism trainings.

**Media Alliance** ([www.media-alliance.org](http://www.media-alliance.org), 510-832-9000) is a media resource and advocacy center for media workers, nonprofit organizations, and social justice activists in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**Reclaim the Media** ([www.reclaimthedia.org](http://www.reclaimthedia.org), 206-709-0558) is a Seattle-based nonprofit organization dedicated to pursuing a more just society by transforming our media system and expanding the communications rights of ordinary people through grassroots organizing, education, networking and advocacy.

**The Texas Media Empowerment Project** ([www.texasmp.org](http://www.texasmp.org)) is a San Antonio-based regional media/social justice group working to empower marginalized communities with the knowledge and skills they need to make media work for justice in their communities.

## Connect with Local Media Reform Groups

Coordinated, local grassroots activism is a driving force in all social change movements. Get involved!

- ✦ Check [www.freepress.net/org\\_directory](http://www.freepress.net/org_directory) for a directory of media reform groups.

Check out the Media Action Grassroots Network, an emerging coalition of regional organizations working together to build a movement for media justice and communications rights. Find them at [www.mediagrassroots.org](http://www.mediagrassroots.org).

## Tap In Online

Blogs (online journals where people can post comments), listservs (automatic mailing lists that connect people who share an interest), and social networking sites (online communities) are all great ways to get a good sense of what's going on in the media reform movement.

### Use the Free Press Action Network.

[www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork)

The Free Press Action Network is a new hub for media reform activism on the Web. This online resource allows users to discuss the latest media reform news, share tactics and strategies, and take action on important campaigns. It's a great place to communicate with other activists who share your passion for media reform.

**Use social networking sites.** Got a page on a site like Facebook, Zaadz, Friendster, or Myspace? Use it to find and connect with other media reformers. Look for a Free Press profile on any of the major sites or interest groups and tags like "media reform," "Stop Big Media" and "Save the Internet." Using YouTube or Flickr or Del.icio.us? Look for our tags and help share photos and videos related to media reform.



### Tip

Let your chat buddies know you're a Free Press member.

Want a Free Press buddy icon for your instant messaging program? Download it at: [www.freepress.net/link](http://www.freepress.net/link).

## Participate in Media Reform Events

Attending conferences, lectures, hearings, fundraisers, rallies and other events about media reform is a great way to plug in to the media reform movement.

The **National Conference for Media Reform** is an exciting, inspiring three-day gathering for people who are concerned about the state of our media and committed to working for change. The conference brings together thousands of activists, concerned citizens, educators, media makers, journalists, artists and policymakers to discuss strategies for creating a better media system. Information about the conference is available at: [www.freepress.net/conference](http://www.freepress.net/conference).

*I got great ideas on how to start our own community radio station;  
I got great training on several subjects and was lifted up by the speakers.  
My networking has already begun, and the relationships that formed at  
the conference will be long and productive for each and every participant.  
I can never thank you enough for this opportunity. You allowed a seed to  
be planted and you watch us grow!*

– National Conference for Media Reform attendee from Alabama

### Other Media Reform Events

- ♦ Visit [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net) for a list of upcoming national and regional events.
- ♦ To find local media-related events, check local independent media (including alternative newspapers and Web sites, community radio stations, and public access TV channels), local organizations, and university communications and journalism departments.

MEDIA REFORM  
ACTION GUIDE

# Appendices

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## Online Activist Tools:

[www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)

### News & Research

#### Media Reform Daily:

[www.freepress.net/newsroom/  
media\\_reform\\_daily](http://www.freepress.net/newsroom/media_reform_daily)

Receive an e-mail each day highlighting the latest news on media policy, activism and reform.

#### News Headlines and Archive:

[www.freepress.net/newsroom](http://www.freepress.net/newsroom)

Check out all the latest headlines and our searchable archive of media-related news stories.

#### Library:

[www.freepress.net/resources/library](http://www.freepress.net/resources/library)

Find reports, books and articles on media activism, media policy, society, culture, and democracy.

#### Media Minutes:

[www.freepress.net/mediaminutes](http://www.freepress.net/mediaminutes)

Listen to a five-minute weekly radio program and podcast that tracks the latest industry developments, keeps an eye on Washington policymakers, and talks to the experts and activists dedicated to changing our media for the better.

#### Free Press en Español:

[www.freepress.net/espanol](http://www.freepress.net/espanol)



## Connections

### Event Calendar:

[www.freepress.net/get\\_involved/event\\_listing](http://www.freepress.net/get_involved/event_listing)

Check out major media reform events in the United States with our continuously updated event calendar.

### Organization Database:

[www.freepress.net/org\\_directory](http://www.freepress.net/org_directory)

Find an organization working on media reform in your community. Free Press maintains a database of groups and organizations involved in the media reform movement.

### Action Network:

[www.freepress.net/actionnetwork](http://www.freepress.net/actionnetwork)

Working together, grassroots and “netroots” activists can make a difference in policy debates and in the halls of Congress. The Free Press Action Network is the place where activists come together to connect, create, communicate and make change.





## Organizing & Advocacy Tools

### Downloadable Resources:

[www.freepress.net/tools](http://www.freepress.net/tools)

Read, use or distribute downloadable resources such as copies of this Action Guide and other brochures, flyers and fact sheets.

### Sign Up for E-Activist Alerts:

[www.freepress.net/e-activists](http://www.freepress.net/e-activists)

Make sure you're signed up to get alerts when there are pressing media policy issues and opportunities for action.

### Policy Updates:

[www.freepress.net/policy\\_updates](http://www.freepress.net/policy_updates)

Keep tabs on media-related legislation in the current session of Congress; find out where your members of Congress stand; and get contact info for your representative and senators.

### StopBigMedia.com:

[www.stopbigmedia.com](http://www.stopbigmedia.com)

Join the movement to roll back media consolidation and create the competition, localism and diversity in media that sustain our democracy. Get all the latest news and tools to stop a few giant corporations from swallowing up more media outlets in your community.

### SavetheInternet.com:

[www.savetheinternet.com](http://www.savetheinternet.com)

See the latest news on the policies and politics that will shape the future of the Internet. Share your story about the importance of a free and open Internet and take action to protect Net Neutrality – the fundamental principle that keeps phone and cable companies from deciding where you can go and what you can do online.



## Sample Letter to the Editor: Net Neutrality

Dear Editor,

*[Insert a sentence here that ties this issue to a recent article or event that makes your letter timely].*

It's time to take a stand on an important public policy issue facing our country: Net Neutrality.

Put simply, Net Neutrality means no discrimination. It's because of Net Neutrality that Internet users can access any Web site on an equal basis. And it's Net Neutrality that has made the Internet such an amazing environment for free speech, democratic participation and economic innovation.

But Net Neutrality is in jeopardy. The nation's largest telephone and cable monopolies – AT&T, Verizon, Comcast and Time Warner – want to be Internet gatekeepers, deciding which Web sites go fast or slow and which won't load at all.

These giant corporations are spending a fortune lobbying Congress to abandon Net Neutrality. If they get their way, the Internet as we know it as an indispensable platform for free speech and economic growth will quickly disappear.

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in Congress that would make Net Neutrality the law of the land.

I hope all Americans who value the freedom of the Internet will stand up and tell Congress to save the Internet.

Sincerely,

*[Your Name]*

*[Your address]*

*[Your daytime phone number]*

## Sample Op-Ed / Commentary

### Congress Should Help Unique Local Stations

As published in the *Nashville Tennessean*, August 23, 2007

By Joseph Torres

You used to be able to drive cross-country and hear different sounds at every stop: classic country in Nashville, soul music in Memphis, zydeco in New Orleans, Tejano in Corpus Christi. Now you can go coast-to-coast and hear the same 15 songs in heavy rotation the whole way. It all sounds the same.

Runaway consolidation has virtually wiped out local music, culture and news on the radio dial. Companies like Clear Channel and Cumulus have swallowed up thousands of stations and piped in cookie-cutter content and canned playlists. Fewer stations employ reporters to cover local news, and fewer local artists are making it on the air.

That's the bad news. The good news is that we have an opportunity to reclaim a portion of the radio airwaves for local communities.

Congress is now considering legislation — the bipartisan Local Community Radio Act — that would create thousands of new low-power FM (LPFM) stations. These 100-watt stations are operated by nonprofit, church, civic and civil rights groups and broadcast over a radius of three to five miles.

LPFM stations are uniquely local outlets. They give local leaders a forum to discuss local issues and provide essential emergency services during times of crisis such as hurricanes. And they're an invaluable outlet for people of color and others who are often shut out of the traditional media.

In 2000, Congress authorized the Federal Communications Commission to issue LPFM licenses. But when big commercial broadcasters claimed LPFM would interfere with their signals, legislators attached a rule that limited the new stations to rural areas.

More than 800 LPFM stations have been licensed to community groups across the country — including WRFN-LP, outside of Nashville. But because of the needless restrictions, thousands of community groups, churches and schools have been stopped from getting licenses.

In Tennessee, less than half of the nearly 60 groups that applied for an LPFM license got one. Many of the groups that were rejected — including the Monroe County Tourism Council, Rutherford County Board of Education and East Wood Church of Christ — probably would have received a license without the unnecessary limits.

Congress ordered the FCC to investigate the big broadcasters' claims of interference. And in 2003, the agency released a \$2 million, taxpayer-funded study — known as the “Mitre Report” — which found that increasing the number of LPFM stations wouldn't interfere with full-power stations. The FCC has urged Congress to repeal the LPFM restrictions.

A broad coalition that includes the Christian Coalition, National Association of Evangelicals, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Prometheus Radio Project and Free Press also strongly supports an expansion of LPFM to America's cities and suburbs. So do thousands of concerned Americans who've already contacted Congress.

The bipartisan Local Community Radio Act (H.R. 2802/S. 1675) would repeal the misguided restrictions and authorize the FCC to license hundreds — if not thousands — of new LPFM stations across the country. U.S. Rep. David Davis, R-Johnson City, is already on board as a co-sponsor. But this bill needs the support of the entire Tennessee delegation.

Passing LPFM legislation this year would give community groups from Bartlett to Spring Hill an opportunity to operate an LPFM station. Isn't it time that the public airwaves were used to serve the public interest?

## Sample Newsletter Article

### Stand Up to Big Media, Pass the Resolution of Disapproval

The FCC is once again trying to bolster Big Media corporations by allowing them to swallow up more local and independent outlets.

On Dec. 18, the agency voted 3-to-2 along party lines to gut the longstanding “newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership” rule, which prohibits one company from owning a newspaper and a TV or radio station in the same market. The FCC’s decision paves the way for further media consolidation, which will mean less local news, fewer diverse perspectives and less competition in our country’s media.

But bipartisan opposition is gathering in Congress to overturn the FCC’s decision. In March, Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) introduced a “Resolution of Disapproval” that would overturn the FCC’s decision to lift the 30-year-old cross-ownership ban.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin claims the rule changes are modest. But giant loopholes leave the back door open for further consolidation in nearly every market. Among the top targets: the already tiny number of stations owned by women and people of color.

What’s more, the Commission granted permanent waivers to cross-owned properties held by media giants Gannett and Media General – a decision Martin never discussed publicly. In one day, the FCC granted more permanent waivers than it did during the entire three-decade ban.

The FCC did all this despite the fact that 99 percent of the public – judging from testimony at FCC hearings and the public comments filed with the agency – opposes media consolidation.

That’s why the “resolution of disapproval” nullifying the FCC’s decision is so vitally important. The resolution would roll back the agency’s Big Media giveaway and help protect diversity and localism in our media markets.

There is a catch, however. The legislation must pass within 60 days that Congress is in session.

The good news is that the resolution enjoys wide support in the Senate. It is co-sponsored by several Republicans, including Sens. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) as well as by Democrats John Kerry (D-Mass.), Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.).

The Senate passed a similar resolution of disapproval in 2003, the last time

the FCC attempted to dismantle media ownership limits. This time around, public support for the resolution will be critical to its passage.

That means you need to get involved! Join the hundreds of thousands of people who have contacted Congress to speak out against media consolidation and demand better media. Visit [StopBigMedia.com](http://StopBigMedia.com) to contact your senators and urge them to support the resolution of disapproval today.



## Talking Points for a Presentation on Media Reform

### Why do we need media reform?

- ✦ To have diverse, independent media ownership that represents all Americans
- ✦ To bridge the digital divide and ensure Internet access for all Americans
- ✦ To ensure that every American community is served by a vibrant and independent public media sector
- ✦ To make media a bona fide political issue in America

**Why our work matters:** Tailor these points to your audience, use examples to make them care. Here are some key points of entry:

- ✦ Media's failure to cover important issues like the economy, health care, the Iraq war and the environment
- ✦ Horse race polls, scandal and partisan spin passing as election coverage
- ✦ The invisibility of issues affecting communities of color and women
- ✦ Unaffordable, unavailable Internet access in so many communities
- ✦ The constant assault on public broadcasting and its funding

**Media policy has been corrupted:** Explain that the media system is not natural, but the result of decades of special interest money and influence on policymaking.

- ✦ The rigged game in Washington has resulted in decisions made in our name but without our informed consent.
- ✦ Over the past few decades, special interest lobbyists have eroded rules that protect the public. Now just a handful of companies control what we read, hear and watch.

**Citizen action can change the system:** Organized people trump organized money. Use the impact of actions in the past to illustrate that we can have an impact now. For example:

- ✦ In 2003, 3 million people contacted the FCC and Congress to oppose new media ownership rules. The Senate voted to overturn the rules, and they were soon thrown out by the courts.
- ✦ Activists used the Internet to save the Internet in 2006, when 1.5 million people and 850 groups from across the political spectrum took action to protect Net Neutrality and keep the open Internet free from corporate gatekeepers.

- Public pressure stopped Congress from cutting funds for public broadcasting and pressured political appointees to stop interfering with content on PBS and NPR.

**Better media equals better democracy:** Whatever issue is most important to you – whether it's the environment, civil rights, health care or education – media should be your second issue. Because if we don't first fix the media, none of these issues will get the attention they should. Media are essential to holding our leaders accountable.



## Sample Letter to Member of Congress

Dear Senator [*last name*] or Congressman/woman. [*last name*]:

I am writing from [*your city and state*] to bring your attention to something that impacts every problem we face as a nation.

I am writing today to urge you to co-sponsor the Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2008 (H.R. 5353), introduced by Reps. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Chip Pickering (R-Miss.). This important, bipartisan legislation protects the free-flowing Internet from blocking, censorship and discrimination by powerful phone and cable companies.

Tens of millions of Americans rely upon an open Internet in their daily lives. Our elected leaders must protect our basic right to communicate from those who want to take it from us. The legislation calls for a nationwide series of public hearings about what the future of the Internet should look like – an important step toward bringing these crucial issues into the light of day.

Please help in this effort by joining Reps. Markey and Pickering in support of the bipartisan Internet Freedom Preservation Act.

I look forward to your response. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

[*Your Name*]

[*Your address*]

[*Your city, state, ZIP*]

# Support the Free Press Action Fund

The Free Press Action Fund is the lobbying and advocacy arm of Free Press. While Free Press conducts the broader education and organizing work of building a media reform movement, the Free Press Action Fund does the heavy lifting.



That includes lobbying Congress and the FCC, funding our staff and office in Washington, filing lawsuits and legal complaints, and making possible the aggressive public interest advocacy necessary to effect real change in media policymaking.

Free Press Action Fund is a member-supported organization. While the big media conglomerates have billions, we have you. Contributions of any size make a real difference. To join, visit: [www.freepress.net/donate](http://www.freepress.net/donate) (it's quick and secure) or complete and mail this form, along with a check made payable to *Free Press Action Fund*, to:

**Free Press Action Fund**, 40 Main Street, Suite 301, Florence, MA 01062.

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