



April 3, 2024

City Hall
1201 7th Street South
Saint Cloud, MN. 56301

Dear Chair Klevhorn and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee:

The City of St. Cloud and our GovTV 181 are writing in support of The Equal Access to Broadband Act HF 4182/SF 4262.

The Equal Access to Broadband Act will allow local governments to negotiate franchise agreements for use of the public rights-of-way by broadband providers. Minnesota communities have a 44-year history of franchising cable TV providers, and this bill will modernize legislation to continue the benefits of franchising for our residents, businesses, schools and non-profits. Local franchising is a proven way to ensure complete buildout provisions, no redlining or cherry picking, faster upload and download speeds, non-compliance provisions, local oversight of commercial users in streets and on public assets, and local customer service resolution.

In addition, HF 4182/SF4262 will modernize the funding structure of local Community Television. St. Cloud's GovTV 181 and other metro area stations -Sartell, Sauk Rapids, Waite Park, and St. Joseph and community television stations across the state rely on cable TV franchise fees and PEG fees to support coverage of local government meetings (including county board meetings), candidate and election programming, sports, news, business and chamber of commerce, education and health, community events and festivals, music, arts and nonprofits that allow residents to engage in our community. This programming has become essential with the loss of local newspapers in many markets.

Challenged Funding:

While our programs are distributed on many digital platforms [YouTube and GovTV 181's live stream] franchise fees are paid only on traditional cable TV service which has been on the decline for a decade.

Franchising broadband will level the playing field and provide ongoing funding to continue serving the needs of our community.

Local Education Partnerships:

The City of St. Cloud's GovTV 181 partners with ISD 742 to manage a K-12 Education channel 179 which provides much needed information to parents regarding their governing body (School Board) and emergency/weather related announcements along with broadcasting local concerts/sports to our local viewers. The St. Cloud PEG structure is unique in that it also has a Higher Ed component-St. Cloud State University utilizes PEG channel 180 to broadcast their Division 1 Hockey games and also to broadcast live their 30 minute daily news program produced by the award winning and nationally known SCSU Mass Communications Department. Real life experience cannot be replaced with "lab" type learning. These students are hands on and are responsible for the final broadcast product.

City Impact:

During the COVID 19 outbreak our GovTV 181 produced live COVID related updates with our Mayor Dave Kleis as the host. He had experts from the Medical, Transportation, and Law Enforcement community provide much needed information at a time of great uncertainty. During the time COVID was at the forefront of the public's interest, statistics show our viewership indicated a 400% increase in viewership! GovTV 181's production team produced over 65 COVID 19 Updates which aired live and put into GovTV 181's replay schedule to saturate our channel with local information our citizens needed and could not find anywhere else. The shows were also made available on our Video on Demand (VOD) service accessed through an internet connection.

Please let us know if you need further information. Thank you for your work on behalf of our residents and our community!

Respectfully Submitted,



Matthew A. Staehling, J.D.
City Administrator