

H.244 Testimony

For House Government Operations & Military Affairs Committee

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Wendy Mays

Executive Director, Vermont Association of Broadcasters

Chairman Birong and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on H.244 on behalf of the 100 broadcast television and radio stations licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to operate in and around the state of Vermont.

A free press plays an essential role in our democracy. But advertising is what generates the income needed for a free press to exist. The trusted and unbiased local news, weather forecasts, sportscasts, road conditions and all the entertainment Vermont's television and radio stations provide is free to consume, but it is not free to produce.

Although a newsroom operates with complete autonomy by design so that sales has no influence over what news stories air, like it or not, it is the income generated by advertising that pays for news department salaries, news gathering equipment, weather forecasting software, regulatory fees, licensing royalties, building maintenance, utilities, etc.

Over the last two decades, the cost to operate a broadcast television or radio station has been steadily increasing while revenue generated by local advertising has been steadily decreasing. The majority of local television and radio advertising comes from local businesses. Every time a local retail business closes, whether it's due to lack of workforce or not being able to compete with Amazon or box stores, Vermont stations lose another advertiser. Looking at all the empty storefronts in most towns, you'll see how quickly the problem compounds.

A substantial portion of marketing dollars that used to be invested with local TV and/or radio stations are now being spent on targeted Google ads, Youtube pre roll and social media platforms. As these advertising dollars go to multi-billion dollar international corporations, local stations have had to make cuts in ways that do not benefit the communities they serve. That could mean one less reporter in a newsroom, running a syndicated radio show in a timeslot that used to have a local air personality or not being able to broadcast live from a community event due to lack of resources.

The Vermont Association of Broadcasters supports H.244 because it will help keep Vermont tax dollars being spent on advertising here in Vermont, getting reinvested in local news organizations and broadcast stations that air local news.

Thank you.