

Alliance for Community Media

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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<http://www.alliancecm.org/>

**MEDIA GROUPS SAY AT&T DISCRIMINATES AGAINST LOCAL CHANNELS;
FILE PETITION WITH FCC TODAY**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 30, 2009) - Community media groups joined with a nationwide coalition of municipalities and regional organizations today in filing a Petition for Declaratory Ruling with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) charging that telecom giant AT&T discriminates against local public channels with its U-verse cable TV system.

"Relegating local, non-profit media channels to second-class status is a disservice to the public and violates both the spirit and letter of the law," said Helen Soule, Executive Director of the Alliance for Community Media (ACM), which represents local Public, Educational and Government (PEG) channels nationwide.

"AT&T's treatment of PEG channels is inferior in virtually every way that matters to a viewer, preventing the public's ability to easily access safety alerts, health information, town hall meetings, educational and other local programming," added Soule.

In California wherever AT&T is providing video programming, its U-Verse system removes local PEG channels from the standard lineup, dumping dozens of channels into a generic "Channel 99" – stripping away individual channel identities and depriving those channels of basic functions viewers have come to expect.

Annie Folger, Executive Director of the Midpeninsula Community Media Center (the "Media Center") in Palo Alto, alerts local viewers: "Before you switch from traditional cable TV to AT&T's U-Verse service, you should be aware that finding your Palo Alto, East Palo Alto or Menlo Park city council meeting on our community channels will be much more difficult than finding a regular, commercial channel."

AT&T subscribers cannot simply tune in a community meeting or homework help program. Viewers can't switch between commercial and PEG channels, set a DVR to record a PEG program, or depend on getting timely local emergency alerts or closed captioned programming.

In an independent report released September 2008, the Congressional Research Service agreed that, "AT&T has chosen not to make PEG programming available to subscribers in the same fashion that it makes commercial programming available."

"AT&T, the company that promotes competition and choice, is giving the public no choice when it comes to accessing local information that isn't readily available on other channels," said Rob Brading, President of the Alliance for Communications Democracy, a national group that defends the public's right to speak via cable television.

The filing follows a sternly worded bi-partisan letter from Congress to the FCC in September saying that changes in the cable TV industry should not lead to second-class status for PEG channels.

"PEG television is essential to our communities as an outlet for free speech, local information and opinions, and emergency communications," said the Sept. 30, 2008, letter signed by Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY), the Chair of the House Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, ranking member Rep. Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) and Appropriations Chair David R. Obey (D-WI.)

Today's Petition asks the FCC to rule that AT&T's PEG product unlawfully discriminates against PEG programming in violation of the 1984 Cable Act and Commission rulings and policies.

Groups filing the claim represent community-based PEG centers, local governments and national associations from around the country dedicated to assuring that PEG channels and services are accessible to local residents, neighborhood groups, high schools, colleges, churches, civic groups and nonprofit organizations.

They include the **Foothill-DeAnza Community College District**, City of Raleigh, North Carolina; the Sacramento, California, Cable Commission; the Illinois Chapter of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) and public access centers such as Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV) and Manhattan Neighborhood Network.

The Petition and background information can be found at: <http://www.alliancecm.org>

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The Alliance for Community Media is a national membership organization representing more than 3,000 PEG access centers across the nation. Local PEG programmers produce 20,000 hours of new programs per week, and serve more than 250,000 organizations annually through the efforts of an estimated 1.2 million volunteers.

**For more information on the Petition for Declaratory Ruling filed today with the FCC,
please contact one of the following spokespersons:**

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