January 8, 2026

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
45 L St. NE
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Uninterrupted Cable/Satellite Customer Access to Broadcast Television

Dear Chairman Carr:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), California League of Cities (Cal Cities), and California State Association of Counties (CSAC), we write to express concern about an ever-growing problem. Increasingly more frequent, contract disputes between over the air television broadcasters and cable or satellite distributors result in “blackouts,” or threatened blackouts, harming viewers’ ability to watch their local broadcast stations. We believe the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) can act to protect vulnerable Americans from being in the middle of this corporate food fight.

In exchange for use of the public airwaves, FCC licensed broadcasters are required to operate their stations for the “public benefit, convenience and necessity” of consumers. By FCC mandate, Broadcasters also participate in the Emergency Alert System (EAS). The Emergency Alert System is activated when minutes count, such as in the event of a fire, flood, or missing child. While the capability to issue similar public safety messages to cellular devices is available, factors like device capability, cell service availability, and user settings make this delivery method less reliable.

Although broadcast signals are technically free over the air, over-the-air antenna reception is simply not feasible or convenient for many residents in our communities, particularly in rural areas. The communities we serve—seniors in particular--rely on cable and satellite services to view local tv stations.

FCC rules essentially require cable and satellite distributors to carry all the broadcast stations in a local market--and in the case of stations that air “Big 4” programming (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox), to pay for that carriage. This regulatory construct distorts the market. The result seems to be that cable and satellite companies must pay ever-increasing rates, with no ceiling in sight, or lose the right to carry the stations. Communities are caught in the middle—they must pay ever-increasing prices for cable and satellite service and still face threats that they'll lose access to local news, public safety alerts, and other television programming.

While we understand that contract negotiations for carriage of programming are complicated, however, customers should not lose access to major local broadcast outlets if companies cannot reach a deal. When negotiations break down, consumers should not be denied content that is intended to be carried out for their benefit.

FCC regulations permit cable television operators to continue the terms of its various local municipal franchise agreements during the renegotiation of those agreements; it only makes sense to permit cable television operators to likewise have continuing access to content broadcast over publicly-owned spectrum.

For the above reasons, we ask that you confirm that cable and satellite distributors and broadcast station owners will keep Big 4 broadcast stations available to consumers in the event of breakdowns or disputes in carriage negotiations. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members of the Federal Communication Commission
Members of the House California Delegation
The Honorable Alex Padilla, U.S. Senator, California
The Honorable Adam Schiff, U.S. Senator, California