

Sept 13 2005 - Slaughter Unveils New Low Power FM Bill Legislation will help communities build ...

Slaughter Unveils New Low Power FM Bill Legislation will help communities build independent radio networks

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today unveiled the "Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act of 2005" at the Fifth Annual Future of Music Policy Summit at George Washington University. Rep. Slaughter's bill will ensure that thousands of American communities do not lose their non-commercial, independent radio stations to corporate media consolidation. Low Power FM (LPFM) radio has already allowed local community groups to provide independent news, public affairs, and entertainment across the country.

Excerpts from Rep. Slaughter's Remarks:

"Today, I will introduce the Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act of 2005. This bill will repeal the law that kept low-power stations off the air across the country, thereby allowing local groups to build thousands more LPFM stations. "

"The bill also describes reasonable guidelines the government can undertake to make sure that the people's airwaves are reserved as much as possible for local community radio now, and as we transition to a primarily digital future."

"In addition, the bill will charge the FCC with using every means available to protect the 600 stations currently operating against encroachment by larger stations."

"In this era of mega-media consolidation, with license owners often thousands of miles away from their listeners, the idea of any real "local" content has become as antiquated - and impossible to obtain -- as doctors' visits to homebound patients."

"Many communities, however, have been kept off the air by a law restricting LPFM stations to very rural areas. The law was passed after big broadcasters claimed that these 100-watt stations would interfere with their full-power radio stations in larger towns and cities."

"After a three-year study, it was proven that these new baby stations did not interfere with the powerful signals of larger radio stations."

"Although the study concluded that low-power FM stations do nothing to threaten the viability of large radio stations, three-years of development in local community broadcasting has been lost...It is high-time that we, as policy-makers, musicians, lawyers, and corporate leaders, take responsibility and support community radio. The future our music and of national discourse depends on it."

"Community radio is a national treasure. But like anything in its infancy, it must be protected and encouraged to grow."

"Those of us who believe that localism and public service contribute to a vibrant democracy and a diverse culture must be ever-watchful guardians of community radio."

Bill Summary/FAQ:

The findings of this bill describe how essential community radio is to the country as it deals with ever-increasing media consolidation. The bill also requests a much-needed comprehensive analysis of radio services as the medium transitions from analog to digital broadcasting.

The Enhance and Protect Local Community Radio Act of 2005 would help thousands of American communities to build and enjoy non-commercial, independent radio stations. Low Power FM (LPFM) radio has already allowed local community groups to provide independent news, public affairs, and entertainment across the country. Churches and ministries, schools and community organizations, use these 100-watt stations for everything from spreading the Gospel to covering PTA meetings.

Many communities, however, have been kept off the air by a law restricting LPFM stations to very rural areas. The law was passed after big broadcasters claimed that these 100-watt stations would interfere with their full-power radio stations in larger towns and cities. But now, a Congressionally mandated \$2.2 million study conducted by the MITRE Corporation has definitely proved that there is room for LPFM on the spectrum without causing airwaves interference.

Rep. Slaughter's bill would repeal the law that kept low-power stations off the air in larger communities, thereby allowing local groups to build thousands more LPFM stations across the country. The bill also describes reasonable guidelines the government can undertake to make sure that the people's airwaves are reserved as much as possible for local

community radio now, and as we transition to a primarily digital future.

Q: Specifically, how would this legislation expand community radio?

A: The Act would repeal the Radio Broadcast Preservation Act of 2000 (Section 3), releasing hundreds of restricted frequencies to the American public (Section 4.1). It would ask the FCC to regularly schedule opportunities for communities to apply for LPFM licenses (Section 4.4) and to study how the transition from analog to digital radio will impact LPFM broadcasters and hopefuls (Section 4.5).

The Act also would ask the FCC to protect LPFM stations that produce 8 hours

or more of original programming from being encroached upon by any full-power FM stations making changes to their licenses, any new full power stations, or any new translator stations (Section 4.6).

Q: Wouldn't building more LPFM stations cause interference to existing full-power stations?

A: The MITRE study proved there was more than enough room for Low Power stations. Even so, the FCC rules for LPFM demand that if a low-power station causes any interference to an existing station, it has 30 days to resolve the interference or go off air forever.

Q: Would this bill restrict reading services for the blind in any way?

A: No. The FCC already protects Reading services for the blind. This bill states again that these vital services must be protected as LPFM expands (Section 4.2).

Q: How would an expanded LPFM service impact translator use across the

United States?

A: Radio stations across the country use translators - unstaffed repeaters - to broaden their coverage. Translator stations are an essential part of broadcasting, but only when they repeat a truly local signal. The bill asks the FCC to use more sophisticated technical licensing options to make the most space on the dial for both translators and for local LPFM stations (Section 4.3.A).

Q: How does this legislation increase localism?

A: This Act asks the Commission to prohibit any one company from repeating its signal more than 20 times through translators, preserving most of the available frequencies for unique, local broadcasts (Section 4.3.B). The Act also asks the FCC to give LPFM applicants planning to broadcast at least 8 hours a day of local programming primary status over unstaffed translators that are repeating a station from far away (Section 4.3.C).

Q: How does this legislation stop illegal trafficking in translator licenses?

A: The Act aims to stop unlawful sales of translator construction permits (CPs) by asking the FCC to ensure that no CPs are voluntarily transferred for translators or booster stations. The Act establishes strict rules for protecting the American public from these fraudulent transfers (Section 4.7).