

Media Consolidation Threatens the Public's Right to Diverse and Competitive Local News and Information

Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America and Free Press, in detailed filings before the Federal Communications Commission, once again underscore the essential link between democracy and an open and independent media. In urging the FCC to adopt media ownership rules that encourage a diversity of viewpoints and access to competitive independent sources of news about local issues, the advocacy groups offered overwhelming evidence supporting the following points:

- The only way democracy can truly work is if there is a free flow of news and information from diverse and independent sources. The public depends upon such open sources to inform themselves of pressing political issues at the national and local levels.
- In study after study, the groups found that even with the explosion of the Internet and cable channels, most people still rely on their local newspapers and local television stations as the most important sources of local news and information.
- Access to local, independent news sources is already a precious commodity, and further consolidation would undermine competition. Today, people living in all but a handful of the very largest cities generally have access to only one local newspaper and four local television stations producing local news.
- Media ownership rules have always been about keeping sources of news and information separate. If these rules are relaxed, and local newspapers and television stations are allowed to be combined, for example, the corporations owning these consolidated companies can exert undue influence over what is considered news and how that news is portrayed. Issues of local concern are increasing given short shrift.
- Detailed analyses show that as media companies consolidate, it is less likely that minority viewpoints will get heard. Furthermore, minority interests are better represented when there are more sources of media and when people of color are able to own media outlets.
- To promote diversity and independent sources of news the FCC must preserve sensible limits on media ownership. It must prohibit major newspapers from buying up local television stations and thereby stifling local news production, and it should not expand the number of TV stations a single company can have in one market. Even in the largest cities in America, the television market is already controlled by too few companies.

- Sensible media ownership limits can ensure that the public will continue to have access to local news and information, encourage more minority ownership of media outlets, and ensure that diverse viewpoints will get heard. An open and robust media is the lifeblood of our democracy because it can serve as a check and balance to government and corporate excess.
- Congress, through the Communications Act and oversight of the Commission, has clearly directed the FCC to promote diversity and competition in local media, and the Supreme Court has indicated that ownership rules which promote these goals are constitutional.