Policy Proposal 2: **Require video service providers to transmit Community TV channels with the same quality reception as the local broadcast channels on the Cable TV line-up.**

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Current Law: Under state law, video service providers "bear the responsibility to transmit programming appearing on the PEG channel."* Unfortunately, the law is silent on the quality of that transmission and provides no penalties for poor transmission quality. (See Wis. Stats. 66.0420 (5)(c)2.)

Under current law:

- Transmission capacity must only be "sufficient" to connect the video provider's facilities with a community television center.
- A Video Service Provider can "determine the most economically and technologically efficient means of providing such transmission capacity." (Wis. Stats. 66.0420 (5)(d) 1.)
- Municipalities must purchase the transmission equipment needed to adapt its superior HD signal to a signal "that is capable of being accepted and transmitted" on whatever system architecture the video service provider chooses to use. (Wis. Stats. 66.0420 (5)(c) 3. a.)
- No penalties exist for "insufficient" transmission of PEG channels.

Why changes are needed to current law: Video providers should transmit Community TV at a level of quality cable television audiences expect to see and *do* see for all other program services on the line-up. The vast majority of WCM member media centers already produce in high definition (HD), but their programming can only be seen in HD on their video-on-demand websites. Audiences are being driven away from local Community Cable TV channels because Video Service Providers downgrade HD signals to SD and transmit an inferior picture on the cable system.

The following changes in law are needed:

- Video Service Providers should transmit Community Television channels without material degradation and without altering or removing content or data provided.
- Video Service Providers should transmit Community Television channels either in (1) a high definition format; or (2) the highest quality format that is provided to a majority of local television broadcast stations in the applicable designated market area, if the quality of that format is better than high definition.
- Video Service Providers should provide the transmission equipment, not just the upstream cabling that connects to their system so the company has the responsibility for equipment compatibility.
- Violations of this state statute should carry consequences that are enforceable by municipalities or the State.

Wisconsin is at a crossroads. If Video Service Providers are not required by the State to provide a high-quality signal to community TV channels, the investment made by municipalities in local programming over cable will continue to decline rapidly and Wisconsin residents will lose the ability to see their communities on television.

Technical issues. Video service providers may argue that they have limited bandwidth on their systems to accommodate all the needs for that bandwidth. However, there is technology available that would allow providers to transmit Community TV channels in HD, without putting pressure on the provider's bandwidth. This could include using an MP4 format to use much less bandwidth or scaling down the number of channels in the 'PEG Neighborhood' by re-purposing unused channels in that group. In Wisconsin, two small Video Service Providers, Solarus and Tri-County Communications Cooperative, transmit Community TV in HD, but the provider that serves nearly the entire state, Charter, does not.

Local cable franchise agreements no longer exist in the State of Wisconsin as of 2008. In effect, the State of Wisconsin is the local cable franchising authority, which governs cable companies (called "video service providers") using state law as the "franchise agreement." Community Television channels are called "PEG" channels -- public, education, and government access channels -- in state and federal law.