

**Testimony of Larry Sidelinger
Executive Director
Lincoln county Television**

**In Support of LD 1967, An Act To Support
Municipal Franchise Agreements
Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology
10-25-23**

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Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

October 25, 2023

Greetings:

Senator Lawrence, Representative Ziegler and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology

I am Larry Sidelinger, Executive Director of Lincoln County Television, or LCTV, located in Newcastle Maine. The importance of Public Access TV, was never more apparent in Lincoln County, than when the Covid 19 pandemic hit. In March of 2020 as the pandemic shut down Maine, and the Nation, our citizens were filled with uncertainty, LincolnHealth's Miles Memorial Hospital in Damariscotta, reached out to LCTV asking if we could record a short segment at the hospital with a Doctor to be shown on local access station channel 7. The purpose was to inform residents what Covid 19 was, and what the hospital was prepared to do. LCTV reacted within an hour. We filmed a 10 minute interview, which within an hour was being played, not only on our cable channel but on vimeo, youtube, facebook, and other social media platforms. Without knowing how many views we had on the local channel, as there is no viewer info numbers from the cable provider, we did have numbers from social media. We found that we had over three thousand viewers in less than twenty four hours, who had watched that important piece of medical information. It was a daily occurrence for people to call the station and ask when our next Covid update from Lincoln Health would occur. LCTV went on to provide this video report from Lincoln Health three times a week for the next six months educating LCTV's viewers about Covid 19, we continued weekly reporting for nearly a year. The interviews ranged from educating the public on everything from how to use telehealth to why one should wear a mask or get a vaccination.

Never was local access TV more important for the public to stay informed of town affairs, than during the Covid shutdown. LCTV was able to film and/or live stream, weekly government meetings for all the towns in our network. These recordings allowed local residents to stay up to date on town matters during Covid.

In the winter of 2021, both local high schools, Lincoln Academy in Newcastle, and Medomak Valley in Waldoboro, reached out for us to live stream the high school basketball games to fans at home as the gyms were locked down due to the pandemic. That year, playing a very limited schedule of just 12 games, we had viewership of nearly ten thousand views, for the two schools, we increased by double that number in 2022, and at the end of the 2023 high school basketball season, with the gyms now open, we had nearly forty thousand viewers over the season, watching both high schools compete, with reports of viewers from all over the country tuning in to see a niece, nephew, or grandchild play!

At the end of the high school year in 2021, Lincoln Academy reached out to LCTV to film and live stream their commencement exercises. Again the viewership was incredible. The success has led Lincoln Academy to continue to live stream, each spring, their Graduation exercises, allowing family and friends nationwide to see graduations.

When covid 19 locked down our main street businesses in Damariscotta, it was the Damariscotta Region Chamber of Commerce that reached out to LCTV for help promoting the local economy. LCTV developed a weekly show, "Chamber Chats", featuring a different business each week, highlighting their business. This format now has two chambers in the Mid Coast involved, highlighting their business community, with a show every week!

As the 2022 election season approached, it was LCTV that was able to broadcast and live stream the political candidates forums highlighting how our democracy works as people were still very reluctant to gather. As well as individual interviews with local candidates.

An example of how unfavorable it is, and has been to work with cable companies can be no more clearer than what has happened in Newcastle Maine. The contract for franchise fees between the town and Spectrum expired in September 2021. To date, a negotiated proposal is sitting in an office somewhere at Spectrum in Rockland, as it has for months, waiting for some kind of acknowledgement from

Spectrum. This delay has cost the town thousands of dollars. Every day the town is ignored is another day that the cable company can operate on an expired contract that is fifteen years old, plus two years and counting.

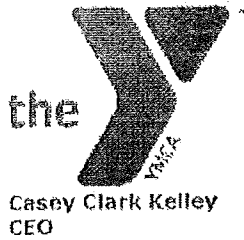
We don't know when another pandemic might hit, but we will be ready. In the meantime we are committed to making sure that citizens of all walks of life - especially seniors - can watch their local government's meetings, see their grandkids play high school sports, hear what's new in town, and stay connected to the community.

I thank you for your time, and urge you all to support this important piece of legislation, which will provide additional mediation and arbitration resources to municipalities, to settle differences with the Video Service Providers in the state of Maine. Again I thank you for your time!

Ladies and gentlemen of the legislature,

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you about public access television in rural Maine, Lincoln County to be exact. At Lincoln County Television, or LCTV as we are known in the community, we serve 9 rural communities in mid coast Maine. Serving the communities of Alna, Bristol, Bremen, Edgecomb, Damariscotta, Newcastle, Nobleboro, Waldoboro, and Wiscasset. We are partially funded by the franchise fees that towns collect, that have been negotiated with Charter Communications, or better known as Spectrum Cable. Every year LCTV must submit a budget request to the towns, which may or not be granted. There is no requirement by law, or any other means dictating what the towns might fund. LCTV, was formed over thirty years ago, by a group of volunteers that were determined, with the advent of cable television, and the ability to have a local channel, to bring local news and entertainment to the local channel, which is channel 7 on the dial. Today LCTV employs a full time Executive Director, Fulltime videographer, a parttime videographer, a fulltime social media director, and a part time computer technician. It is from the efforts of this team, as well as the support from the community that makes this "home grown" tv station possible. At LCTV we produce weekly news shows, Community Conversation shows, introductions to new, or old businesses, in our area with a Chamber of Commerce show , also live streaming of local high school sports, and urgent medical updates throughout the covid pandemic, and much more from Festivals to parades. There are approximately seventeen thousand cable subscribers to Spectrum Cable in Lincoln County, although that number maybe questionable as it is not voluntarily confirmed by Spectrum, as they reluctant provide statistics to our towns, with their quarterly payments. This leaves the towns with no idea if the money they receive is accurate with the subscribers in their town. With the increase in "cord cutting" from Cable television, the need to hold internet providers and cable companies accountable to their franchise contract is more important than ever. Thank you for your time.

Larry Sidelinger
Executive Director
Lincoln County Television
MCMA
Board Member



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

October 13, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The partnership between our organization, Central Lincoln County YMCA, and Lincoln County Television has always been established, but truly flourished at a time when connecting with one another was so challenging—the pandemic. Under Larry Sidelinger's leadership of LCTV, our partnership with our local broadcasting station strengthened, allowing our YMCA the opportunity to stay connected with the community through one of the most challenging years we have faced. Our community is known as being the oldest town in the oldest county in the oldest state and that means virtual opportunities for connecting aren't as comfortable or as accessible for all our residents and members. LCTV's partnership with the CLC YMCA has allowed us a platform that kept us "together" and allowed us to inform them of services our Y is providing and where they can ask for help if they need it. Most of the community was isolated for a long period of time and through our broadcasts with LCTV, we could let them know that the Y was offering meal delivery services and we had resources to help them if they were struggling financially.

Through LCTV we've shared fitness programs, cooking classes, available community services, updates on the status of the Y, vaccine information, and we even hosted our Annual Celebration to recognize volunteers and donors for support of our community. LCTV has also given a voice to the youth in our community through their Youthful Noise programming.

LCTV is a necessary platform that allows our community to stay connected and this connection was needed during the pandemic more than ever. As a small non-profit with limited means, this local broadcasting partnership truly impacted our ability to reach the greater community while so many were staying safe at home.

Sincerely,

Casey Clark Kelley



Damariscotta Region
— Chamber of Commerce —
& Information Bureau

October 13, 2023

From: Lisa Hagen, Executive Director
Damariscotta Region Chamber of Commerce

Re: Letter of Support for Lincoln County Television

On behalf of the Damariscotta Region Chamber of Commerce, this letter is in emphatic support of Lincoln County Television (LCTV) and the service it provides to the community at large. LCTV serves an invaluable, irreplaceable role in connecting our local businesses to the community through the weekly 30-minute Chamber Chat show.

Every Wednesday at 7:00pm, viewers on our local cable channel 7 and via the web at LCTV.org can meet a local business owner and hear about its support for the community. Each Chamber Chat show promotes and highlights member businesses, the services they provide to customers, and the positive value they contribute to the Midcoast Maine region.

Comments and feedback from citizens show that these shows are valued and appreciated – many business owners report to me that a new, valued customer heard about their business through Chamber Chat!

Business owners can freely download their show for use on their own website and social media. The more each show is promoted, the more broadcast and On Demand views it receives from potential and returning customers.

In 2023, LCTV will produce 50 Chamber Chats for Lincoln County's local Chambers. LCTV handles all production details, including filming, editing, and preparing for broadcast and On Demand access. As well as a primetime weekday 7:00pm premiere, each show is re-broadcast at least 10 more times in following weeks at different broadcast times.

Thank you for this opportunity to share how important LCTV is in supporting and championing locally owned and operated businesses here in Midcoast – the biggest and most essential part of our economy success.

Lisa Hagen

Christopher Hall
PO Box 218
Bristol, ME 04539
(207) 563-8604

Public Access Television – Lincoln County TV

Honorable Members of the Committee on State and Local Government:

I am writing in support of L.D. 1967, 'An Act to Support Municipal Franchise Agreements.'

Public, Educational and Government ('PEG') television, often referred to as Public Access Television, plays an important role in a rural Maine town such as Bristol, from which I retired as Town Administrator at the end of 2022. The local PEG station, Lincoln County Television, airs Bristol municipal meetings via two video service providers, Spectrum Cable and LCI / Tidewater Telecom. The Town Office has found that meetings of the Select Board, Comprehensive Plan Committee and Budget Committee are widely watched, based on feedback from residents. During Covid especially, this was an essential way for municipal officials to communicate with residents.

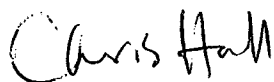
The Town of Bristol would benefit from two provisions of LD 1967.

Indirectly but importantly, it would benefit from the provision of updated technology and equipment, furnished to the PEG channel by the video service provider, as foreseen in the new §3008, Sub-§ 3, ¶G. Volunteer-operated PEG stations do not have the financial resources to continually upgrade their equipment, while video service providers have been known to deny them access to upgraded equipment purchased by the provider for use with commercial channels.

Directly, Bristol would benefit from the provisions in Section 12, the new §3008, Sub-§5-A, ¶¶C and D. Bristol has never received from its cable franchisee, Spectrum, information regarding the basis for the annual check mailed to the Town as payment of its Franchise Fee. Repeated requests for information were ignored. It would be very reassuring to have access to audited information giving the basis for the calculation of the payment.

I hope you will be able to report 'Ought to Pass' on this bill.

Sincerely,



Christopher Hall (Maine House, 120th, and Senate, 121st Legislatures)



To Whom it May Concern:

Lincoln County TV is as its promo says “your homegrown, nonprofit, community media station for Lincoln County, Maine’s people, places and events since 1989. We produce original shows, partner on community productions, livestream youth sports, ensure access to municipal meetings, cover community events, provide essential health updates, and more.”

The “and more” is critical. The list of programming is extensive.

The local presence of Lincoln County TV enables the residents of our area to watch uniquely local programming, enhancing local voices about their community and local events and issues of interest to them.

LCTV provides knowledge and participation in local government to those unable to attend public meetings and allows transparency so citizens can monitor local government actions - something vital to the health of local democracy.

The fact that LCTV is a non-profit, dependent on mandated cable franchise fees that are passed through to them from municipalities, business sponsorships, production services, and generous community donors and receive zero tax dollars in itself is admirable.

Personally, the Wiscasset Area Chamber of Commerce has been served very well the generous opportunity and support LCTV affords through their Chamber Chat programming. Our members and community partners have a voice, promoting new businesses to town that help to strengthen our economy and ensure future growth and development.

Sincerely,

Patricia A Cloutier, Executive Chamber Manager

20 October 2023

Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Technology
Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine

I am writing on behalf of Lincoln County Television (LCTV) and the important role the station plays in the Lincoln County community and beyond. Yet despite the many, many successes of LCTV, the station is often struggling with budget issues, not uncommon for nonprofits. That's where LD 1967, an Act to Support Municipal Franchise Agreements can help. LCTV needs the funds which should be available from franchise fees.

LCTV, as the local public access station, provides an invaluable community link featuring a wide range of informative and entertaining programming. From high school football and basketball games, Select Board meetings, political candidate forums and interviews, local business features, and community interest shows, LCTV has something for everyone.

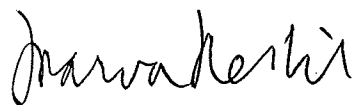
LCTV has been an important partner for LincolnHealth (LH). The partnership began with the outbreak of Covid 19. As LincolnHealth moved ahead in the uncertainty of Covid, LCTV made it possible for us to speak directly to our community. We were able to share what we knew and didn't know and our plans for managing Covid on campus and in our medical practices. It allowed us to address the concerns of our local citizens such as masking and vaccinations. A partnership was born.

From there, the partnership continued to grow. The station featured interviews with the LH outgoing (retiring) president and the newly appointed president. LCTV even interviewed the new CEO of the MaineHealth system when he came onboard. He was able to discuss the relationship between MaineHealth and LH for the

viewers. LCTV over the years featured various LH initiatives even touring new facilities opening on campus (such as the new Wellness and Rehab Center) so local viewers could be introduced to the new services available. New staff members and new services being offered on campus are often introduced on LCTV.

When LH wants to get the word out to the community, we turn immediately to LCTV. They have been an unfailing, responsive partner ready to support LH on a moment's notice. LH appreciates and values the ongoing partnership in a world of ongoing medical challenges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marva Nesbit". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Marva Nesbit, Secretary
LincolnHealth Board of Trustees