

**Statement in Support of L.D. 1967,
An Act To Support Municipal Franchise Agreements
Submitted by Assistant City Manager
Jared Mills
October 19, 2023**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Ziegler, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. My name is Jared Mills, I am the Assistant City Manager for the City of Augusta, and I am here today on behalf of CTV7.

The City of Augusta manages and maintains program responsibility for CTV7 and we retain the professional services of Digital Spirit Media (DSM). CTV7 provides cablecast oversight by producing and cablecasting City Council, Planning Board and School Board meetings as well as produces a number of shows and special events each year. Additionally, CTV7 maintains the Public Service Announcement Bulletin Board, education, and government related shows for cablecast. The Bulletin Board is available for civic groups, social organization, education and municipal institutions.

L.D. 1967 maintains local control with municipalities retaining their decision to charge franchise fees but makes them payable to the municipality quarterly, not annually. It affirms that the Attorney General (and the Public Advocate if they agree) would handle consumer complaints as they have in the past, with occasional municipal franchise non-compliance issues to be resolved with the assistance of the PUC through an arbitration process. It requires all Video Service providers to carry public, educational and governmental access channels on the provider's basic cable or video service offerings, tiers or apps in HD if HD is provided by the PEG station. It eliminates mandatory preconditions for implementing the 15 residences per linear strand mile and defines how the strand mile is measured. It clarifies the responsibility of a video service provider with respect to the costs associated with public, educational and governmental facility transmission equipment including HD carriage. Finally, it retains millions of dollars for local use that would otherwise leave the state as profits for the industry.

The Federal Trade Commission's recent Franchise Fee Order allows cable companies to reduce what they pay for the use of public property by *redefining* the federal Cable Act's 5% franchise fee to include the value of most non-monetary franchise obligations as franchise fees. The federal Cable Act requires cable companies to pay the franchise fee and to meet community needs and interests, but the FCC's actions in the order have the effect of reducing cable operators' monetary compensation to towns and cities, and will result in diminished resources for local community television programs at a time when Americans need more local content.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, it is important to the City of Augusta that L.D. 1967 pass in order for us to remain transparent in our connections with our community. Now more than ever this is of the utmost importance. Losing this ability would be a huge step backwards for our community and could have damaging effects. I urge that you give LD 1967 an Ought To Pass report. Thank you for listening.