

NEWS RELEASE

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FCC Consent Decree Allows Comcast to Buy Its Way Out of Penalties, Unions Charge

Washington, D.C. -- The Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers expressed disappointment at the refusal of the Federal Communications Commission to make certain that Comcast Corp., fully adheres to the Public File rule. That rule requires cable companies to make available public information on request; the unions are considering an appeal to the full Commission.

The FCC's Enforcement Bureau instead announced a three-year consent decree with Comcast Corp., requiring Comcast only to make a small payment of \$225,000, and permitting the company, in effect, to buy its way out of serious FCC rule violations. This is just another example of Comcast trying to sidestep its obligations to the public and bully its way out of rules that are in the public interest, the unions charged.

The FCC's Public File rules require the operator of any cable system to maintain specific documents and to make this file available during regular business hours.

In a complaint filed nearly a year ago, CWA and the IBEW uncovered more than 113 violations in a review of 225 Comcast locations. The FCC's rules call for a fine of up to \$12,000 per violation, making Comcast liable for more than \$1.35 million, the unions said. Yet the FCC Enforcement Bureau accepted a voluntary payment by Comcast of just \$225,000.

Comcast, in its own submissions, admitted to extensive violations. This consent decree changes the existing FCC rule – apparently for Comcast only – that currently requires cable companies to keep the Public File in the local community and permits them to maintain it in the technically integrated unit, a more centralized location.

For the public, this means limited access to key information about how much or little time is devoted to children's programming, requests by political candidates for broadcast time, equal employment information, and assurance of Comcast's adherence to technical standards and requirements.

The Enforcement Bureau's decision means that Comcast customers will be forced to travel significant distances to read the Public File, more than 36 miles from Boulder to Denver, Col., or more than 70 miles across Tennessee to Knoxville, for example.

FCC Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein have raised concerns about the consent decree and stressed that “it’s time the Commission reaffirmed the rights of viewers to receive basic information to gauge the accountability of their media,” the unions noted.

In the past, the FCC has emphasized the importance of public disclosure and that it considered violation of these rules to be a serious matter, the unions said. Unfortunately, this consent decree does not live up to the Commission’s past statements, they said.

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