



PRESS STATEMENT

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ACTIVIST & MEDIA JUSTICE GROUPS DECRY APPROVAL OF CITY'S CABLE FRANCHISE AGREEMENT WITH VERIZON

Contending the public did not receive adequate notification of public hearing or tentative agreement, Common Cause/NY and People's Production House criticize rushed decision by city's Franchise and Concession Review Committee

Common Cause/New York and People's Production House expressed great regret and concern that the New York City's Franchise and Concession Review Committee (FCRC) abruptly approved an agreement between the City and Verizon after little opportunity for the public to participate in the process.

"This \$70 billion deal, drawn up behind closed doors, undoubtedly could use a brief timeout for public review," said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/New York. "The approval of this agreement is premature. It is a \$70 billion bun that needs more time in the oven."

"This franchise will determine how New Yorkers watch TV, talk on the phone, and use the Internet for decades. It will generate tens of billions of dollars in revenue for Verizon," said Joshua Breitbart, Policy Director of People's Production House. "A deal of this magnitude deserves more than four days of sunlight. The members of the Franchise and Concession Review Commission have done the public a disservice with today's rubber stamp."

The groups called for a delay in the approval process at a little-noticed public hearing in Brooklyn last week, and joined with Council Members Gail Brewer and Tony Avella, alongside New York Public Interest Research Group and Consumers Union, to echo that call for a delay from the steps of New York City Hall.

The 12-year franchise agreement will permit Verizon to sell cable television service throughout the city along with its phone and Internet services. The agreement was

negotiated by Verizon and the Mayor's Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications behind closed doors.

The groups have been urging the FCRC not to approve the agreement with Verizon until the following issues are addressed:

- All government and educational programming should be made available through Video on Demand technology, greatly increasing the access everyday New Yorkers have to their government. These channels should be made available in high definition and not be treated as second tier resources.
- The Technology and Education Fund and should be dramatically increased, from its current pittance of \$4 million for 5 boroughs over seven years.
- Verizon's requirement to build-out services to lower-income communities must be dramatically improved. Simple language changes in the agreement could amount to dramatic improvements.
- NYC should establish a Cable Franchise Oversight Committee, as has been done in many municipalities throughout the country.
- The modified contract must include enforceable penalties built into the contract to insure adequate incentive for timely performance and incentive to correct problems.
- Consumer protections should be strengthened, including requirements related to Significant Outages, poor customer service, and missed service or installation appointments. The proposed agreement weakens established consumer protection standards.

Common Cause/NY is a non-partisan citizen's lobby whose goal is open and accountable government.

People's Production House is a comprehensive media justice organization serving New York City, Washington DC, and the Gulf Coast.