



**Testimony of Andrea Price, President of Public Access of Indianapolis, Inc.
to the Indianapolis Cable Franchise Board
May 15, 2006**

My name is Andrea Price, and I am the Board President of Public Access of Indianapolis, a nonprofit community media organization. Our mission is to promote and provide non-discriminatory, community access to communication tools and technologies, and to support media that represent the diverse interests and viewpoints of the community. We organized in 1997 around two of our primary goals: the creation of an Indianapolis community media center for community-based training and production, and restoration of Indianapolis' public access television channel. Since then, Public Access of Indianapolis has provided volunteer video services for nonprofits, schools and community groups; maintained a streaming video library of community events and meetings on our website, www.indyaccess.org; provided training to youth and adults in the use of video technology; published the bi-monthly newsletter, *The Right of Way*; and organized the biennial Indianapolis Alternative Media Festival. We call it, "Building community through media."

We also say, "A world class city needs world class community media." Yet, Indianapolis remains one of only two major cities in the United States without a public access television channel and community media center.

We lost those valuable community resources in the 1996 cable franchise renewals with Bright House Networks (then Time Warner and formerly American Cablevision) and Comcast. The possibility of a local cable franchise renewal with Bright House Networks by next month is the best opportunity we have had in ten years to restore public access television to at least part of Indianapolis. We affirm the value of a local cable franchise agreement to Indianapolis, including accessible and speedy local complaint mediation, auditing that has brought hundreds of thousands of dollars to the City, the retention of local customer service jobs and staff, the I-Net, the availability of cable television and cable modem service throughout the county, and the provision of adequate resources to support vibrant public, education, and government (PEG) access television. However, we are concerned if we do not make the most of this opportunity to restore public access television, residents within the old City limits will be left without a voice for another 10 years or even longer.

Across the US, local PEG programmers produce 20,000 hours of new programs per week – more new programming than all of the broadcast networks combined. 250,000 organizations and 1.2 million volunteers make use of some 3000 access centers and channels.

There is also a legacy of strong public access television in Indiana, although not in the state's capital. Ft. Wayne, for example, has been selected as the location to house two important historical libraries related to public access television, including the work of New York University Film Professor George Stoney, called the "Father" of public access television, whose groundbreaking 1953 film, *All My Babies*, is preserved in the Library of Congress' National Film Registry.

When Professor Stoney came to Indianapolis in 2004 as keynote speaker of our Alternative Media Festival, he was recognized by the City County Council for his body of film work, decades as an educator of documentary filmmakers, and historic activism on behalf of community television in the US and Canada. Professor Stoney took a keen interest in our city, our history, our culture, and our buildings, monuments and architecture. He also asked to read our cable franchise agreements, which were negotiated without input from any of us present today, then chastised *all of us* -- as only an 88 year old man could get away with – for one of the worst cable franchise agreements he had even seen when it comes to providing for the community. One of the many things I learned from Professor Stoney was that the problem we are experiencing in Indianapolis today, where we have strong, government access television, but no public access television, was a foreseeable outcome of the change from the original term, "community access" television, to "PEG access" televi-

sion. So my purpose today is to ask all of Indianapolis, including Bright House Networks and Comcast, to work together to put the *community* back into Indianapolis cable access TV.

Community Needs: To my knowledge, no new community needs assessment studies have been initiated. Fortunately, we do have several points of data to understand the needs and interests of Indianapolis as it pertains to public access television.

In June 1994, Municipal Services Associates, Inc. delivered an extensive community needs assessment, "Utilization Review and Future Uses Study" on Indianapolis public, education and government access television, that had been commissioned by the Cable Franchise Board. . Municipal Services Associates found that Indianapolis' then public access TV had a number of significant inhibitors, resulting in the underutilization of its production facilities:

- Inadequate promotion and outreach, particularly to the nonprofit community
- Equipment that was at the end of its useful life and cumbersome and expensive to use
- Waits of up to 6 months for training to use production facilities and equipment
- Fees for the use of equipment and studios
- Inadequate staffing

The study made a number of recommendations to improve public access TV in Indianapolis, which it found the least developed of its peers: government access and educational access television. Recommendations included:

- Developing an alternative funding and management mechanism for public access TV, such as a nonprofit corporation, increase to a 5% franchise fee, and use of franchise fees
- Eliminating the bottlenecks in training and inhibitors in video production
- Replacing equipment
- Ensuring cable operator compliance with certain sections of the franchise agreements

In this 91-page 1994 study, Municipal Services Associates also talked about the potential for managing public access television in cooperation with education access television and even government access television. I think that potential still exists today, with the benefit of high efficiency through shared resources. In particular, if I look at our organization, Public Access of Indianapolis, and the Educational Television Cooperative (ETC) that runs the two Indianapolis educational access channels, I see a lot of potential for partnership. I would go so far as to say that our organizations' strengths are quite complimentary. So as we consider *how* to run public access television, I would welcome discussion about partnering that respects the different missions and considers the needs of all three components of PEG access television.

Using data from the 1994 study we looked at the impact of the elimination of public access television and reported the results to the Cable Franchise Board. We found that ten years later, Indianapolis had lost 80% of its community producers. We found that "Local Community Interest Programming" – even contractually defined as 25 hours of programming *from* local religious, charitable, literary, cultural and public health organizations -- could not sustain what our "underutilized" public access channel had provided. I want to state clearly that my comments are in no way a criticism of that channel used for Local Community Interest Programming. As a community media organization, our foundational values include diversity of commercial media ownership, localism, carriage of all local channels on cable television systems, and public interest programming, which this channel provides far and above the national average of .5%. I have shared the story many times, but I personally used and supported this channel before I discovered public access television as the only viable solution for smaller groups to affordably produce their own quality shows. It, like public access television and public broadcasting, is a vital part of the spectrum of channels that should be available in a community and on cable television, and there is tremendous opportunity to increase local programming through cooperation, especially since there is now plenty of channel capacity on cable television.

Indianapolis cable subscribers, who pay the franchise fees that support access television, expressed strong support for public access television in a December 1998 customer satisfaction survey, the "Indianapolis Cable Franchise Board Cable Television Quality and Value Survey" by Harvard Information Services of Carmel, IN. Of the 600 telephone-surveyed cable subscribers, even split between Bright House Networks and Comcast, 84% thought it valuable to have at least one local cable television channel openly available for use by the community, and 72% thought such a channel is important.

I would like to deliver two things demonstrating Indianapolis' continued desire for a public access television channel. The first is a list of organizations that think Indianapolis should have a public access television channel. Although the image of public access TV may be *Wayne's World*, the reality of public access television is that it offers tremendous benefit to local businesses, community groups, local musicians, the library, health and welfare associations, neighborhood associations, cultural groups, filmmakers, and churches, which is usually the single largest group of public access producers. Organizations such as Citizen's Action Coalition, the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Central Indiana Labor Council, and locally-owned businesses such as Key Cinemas, Rehab Resources, Utrillos art gallery, and Just Hair Salon are among the supporters of public access television, and among the constituency that has lost the most without it. In addition to affording these organizations an avenue for education, publicity, PSAs, and outreach, public access television provides a connection for those whose health no longer allows them to directly participate in activities important to them. One example is the Lutheran Brotherhood's widely-distributed, Dayton public access program, *Worship for Shut-Ins*.

Five days ago, we asked people to add their comments to our website, www.indyaccess.org, on why they support a public access TV in Indianapolis. I will give you a copy of the comments we have received thus far, with the rest to be delivered at the official public hearing at the Rules and Public Policy Committee for the Bright House Networks franchise renewal on June 6. I would like to share four short examples of comments:

Joanne Bloomberg: "The community of Indianapolis needs to have their voice back - especially if we are to be a world-class community. What does world class mean without the voice of its' people?"

Sandy Hawk: "Indianapolis needs Public Access Television!"

We here in Indianapolis need the freedom to communicate that only a community-based Public Access Channel can provide.

We have become a visual culture, and television has become the dominant communication channel for news and information, but the number of local and independent voices putting television programming on the air is diminishing as the media, cable and telecommunications industries consolidate.

Public Access Television is a counterweight to the corporatization of media content. And it is a communication tool that gives all the various communities that make up our City the ability to visually speak to one another and share their stories, their hopes and fears, and their dreams. This sharing is essential if we are to find the strength and creativity we need to move forward together into the 21st Century as a world class city."

Jane Clark: "I believe public access TV is increasingly relevant for communities going into the future from the aspect of archiving historical knowledge, diversity, local issues, the arts, volunteerism, fundraising, democracy, skills training and community pride!"

Joshua Ramsey: "I'm heavily involved in local independent film and have wanted a venue to display my own work and see others' without the requirement of renting a theatre - an expense most local filmmakers can't afford. Without their work being seen, how can they gain the attention they need to gain the funding necessary to rent a theatre?"

In translating this information on community needs to cable franchise contract terms, we propose the following:

- One public access television channel available for activation in 2007
- Additional public access television channels available as usage increases (the number depending on contract length)
- Compensation and adequate notice for PEG channel movement
- PEG access television participation in all programming guides, print and electronic
- PEG access television participation in video on demand services
- Interconnection to any local community media center(s)
- Technology parity for PEG access channels with other cable channels
- Free promotional spots and billing inserts
- PEG funding support

Today Indianapolis government access television and education access television are supported by a very small portion of the cable franchise fees paid to the City and through capital grants by the cable companies that go into a dedicated PEG fund. A continuation of this approach with the inclusion of public access television would obviously be acceptable. Another alternative gaining momentum is the allocation of an additional 1% over and above the franchise fees to cover all PEG access funding. This approach is currently included in the national video franchising legislation under consideration in both Congressional Houses. Although this is significantly less than the Alliance for Community Media's recommendation for a city the size of Indianapolis, we do think it is a financially viable alternative to meet Indianapolis' needs, that is also in line with where legislation appears to be headed.

We also looked at how this would compare with several other cities.

Media Bridges (Cincinnati and Hamilton County, OH) delivers nearly a 7x return on investment to the greater Cincinnati community. With a \$5.3million economic impact, according a 2003 study, Media Bridges cablecasts more than 15,000 hours of local programming on three public access and one educational access channels, produced by and for organizations such as the Contemporary Arts Center, the Lifecenter Organ Donor Network, the Literacy Network of Greater Cincinnati and more than 80 area religious organizations. Media Bridges provides production assistance to local nonprofits and also covers community events. One of the public access channels is devoted to religious programming. Cincinnati's 1996 franchise with Time Warner provides up to 9 PEG channels and \$.96 per subscriber per month supports public access television. In addition, major financial supporters of Media Bridges include AT&T (SBC), Fifth Third Bank, The Greater Cincinnati Fund, the Ohio Arts Council, and more than 50 other businesses that donate \$1000 or more.

In the suburban Detroit communities of Farmington Hills, Farmington, and Novi in southwest Oakland County, Bright House Networks provides 6 PEG access channels on the basic tier, an additional 1% funding for PEG support (in exchange for the Bright House Networks public access studio and equipment), and PEG television programs are listed in Bright House Network's electronic program guide as part of their 2000 franchise agreement. Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission (SWOCC) runs all channels from the same location, with some equipment dedicated to public access, and other equipment dedicated to government access. There is also a volunteer Public Access Promotion Committee. Community produced programming is shown on the public access channel, but may also be shown on the educational and government access channels. Basic training classes and cablecasting are free for residents, and the studios are available for rental for commercial productions.

Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV) has five public access channels and ran 160 hours of local election coverage during the 2004 election season, which the *Chicago Tribune* hailed as "serious politics." CAN TV also showed interviews of state legislators from the *Illinois Channel* that provides C-SPAN type coverage of state government that is distributed throughout the state via access channels. CAN TV dedicates one of its public access channels to religious programming, and another provides an interactive community bulletin board with news about jobs, cultural activities, nonprofit resources, and audio from Chicago Public Radio.

Grand Rapids Community Media Center's Mobile Media Lab for Information Education (MoLLIE) project brings digital video cameras and laptops with editing software to public, private and parochial grade schools and middle schools throughout the city. Thousands of young people have had the opportunity to learn to create and edit videos as part of school projects in subjects including civics, science, language arts and history. Working in teams of three to five, the young people have fun, practice teamwork, demonstrate mastery of the subject matter, learn about the power of media, and engage their family and friends when their videos air on MoLLIE Matinee on public access TV. One civics-related project at a school in an area with low voter turnout resulted in 40 new registered voters when the videos were shown to parents.

Grand Rapids Community Media Center (GRCMC) also houses a community radio station in addition to its public access television facilities, and recently acquired the historic Wealthy Theater for special events.

Dayton Access Television (DATV) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that runs Dayton two public access television channels, one dedicated to religious programming. DATV is primarily funded by cable franchise fees and Time Warner capital grants, and has a \$700k annual budget, and 800 members.

There are just a few examples of what public access television is capable of providing to a community. According to the International Center, there are 209 different languages spoken in Indiana. Public access television is an invaluable tool

to build understanding, share news from home, and engage the entire community in our diverse city. In addition, access centers provide valuable technical training and jobs. It is noteworthy that PEG operations employ more people of color in management and technical positions than in all commercial media industries combined. PEG access centers also provide vocational training and internships for local high school and college students.

As we move forward in restoring public access television in Indianapolis, we also have the strong access centers in Indiana cities such as Richmond, Bloomington and Ft. Wayne that are willing to host visits and offer guidance.

In closing, I want to thank all of the people who have been tireless in their efforts over the last four weeks to alert the Indianapolis community about Bright House Network's interest in a local franchise renewal by July 1. I would also like to thank all of the groups who added us to their meeting agendas at the last minute, and all the people who met with us on short notice. From this community effort, I am convinced that Indianapolis should not just have a public access television channel, but should be one of the leading – world-class -- community access television communities.

Thank you for the time on the agenda today. I would be happy to answer any questions.