

National Black Church Initiative

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The National Black Church Initiative Calls on The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to Extend the Viewability Rule

If not extended this will harm the church-based broadcasters and limit access

Washington, DC - The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) a coalition of 34,000 churches spanning 15 denominations and representing 15.7 million African Americans would like to express our concerns that the expiration of the “viewability” rule could have a serious negative impact on viewers of faith-based programming throughout the country. Much of this programming is viewed on must-carry television stations.

We would like to ensure that our content reaches everyone who would like to see it – including those consumers that cannot afford, or are not aware that they need, a new cable box.

The Rev. Anthony Evans, President of NBCI says, “we strongly believe that it is the job of the FCC to assure that minority church-based broadcasters should receive the same consideration as large cable operators. We strongly urge the Federal Communications Commission to extend the rule because many of our 15.7 million members will be directly and adversely affected by the FCC not extending the viewability rule. We plan to fight for our right to have comprehensive access to all cable systems whether it is analog, digital or hybrid systems. We plan to let our congressional representative know our position. We will use the full force of the Black Church to be heard on this issue.”

As we understand it, the Commission is considering letting the rule that now makes sure must-carry stations be viewable by all cable viewers expire. We fear that this could have a devastating impact on our viewers, because many of them rely on analog cable service. Currently, roughly 22 percent of cable subscribers rely on analog service and many more use analog service on second and third TVs.

The end of the viewability rule would allow cable providers to basically cut off must-carry stations from those viewers. In order to access our content, these consumers would be forced to go through the hassle and expense of purchasing and installing a new converter box. Ending the viewability rule would transfer the burden of complying with these requirements from cable providers to consumers.

Rev. Mark McCleary, Chair of NBCI Minister Alliance is leading an all out effort to notify NBCI members about this possible rule change. “We have notified over 11,000 of our churches who plan to make phone calls and write the FCC on this issue. We want to send a clear message to the FCC. Please do not cast us aside in order to cater to big cable businesses over the objection of minority church-based broadcasters. Our tax dollars built and continues to sustain the public airwaves and we deserve just as much access as any other broadcasters regardless of its size and we will fight to be heard.”

The end of the rule also will reduce programming diversity. Our broadcasters offer unique faith-based programming targeting often under-served audiences. The stations that carry our programs are generally independent and cannot afford the lost viewership that is likely to result from allowing the current viewability rule to expire.

Today broadcast television is also making great strides in offering new opportunities for African-American voices, and now is the wrong time to take a step backward. NBCI members are not asking for a special rule or favor. We believe that cable providers should not have the ability to discriminate against small local broadcast stations that serve audiences who desire faith-based programming.

To the extent that a cable provider continues to offer some analog programming to its subscribers, we believe they should continue to provide must-carry signals in analog as well.

While our content may not compete with sports or entertainment programming, to the viewers who rely on us, it is no less important. We ask that the Commission carefully consider our viewers as it deliberates on whether to extend this rule.

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI’s mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. The National Black Church Initiative’s methodology is utilizing faith and sound health science. The National Black Church Initiative’s purpose is to partner with major organizations and officials whose main mission is to reduce racial disparities in the variety of areas cited above. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI’s programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work.

Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.