



Defend the Press: Scrapping the National TV Ownership Cap Would Raise Bills, Gut Local News, and Sidestep Congress

FCC Chairman Brendan Carr has scheduled an August 6 vote to repeal the national television ownership cap and replace it with a vague, agency-controlled 'case-by-case' review. This move should alarm every American who pays a TV bill and relies on local news. The cap, which for decades has barred any single company from owning stations that reach more than 39 percent of U.S. households, is one of the last remaining guardrails against runaway media consolidation. Removing it would hand a handful of corporations unprecedented control over what local communities see, hear, and pay for.

It would also almost certainly break the law, no matter how the FCC dresses up the repeal as a 'case-by-case' standard rather than an outright elimination. The 39 percent cap is not merely an agency rule the Chairman can rewrite on a whim; it is enshrined in statute by Congress. As Commissioner Anna Gomez has made clear, only Congress, not the FCC, has the authority to raise or eliminate it. For Chairman Carr to erase the cap by fiat would be a blatant overreach, substituting the will of one political appointee for the judgment of the people's elected representatives.

Defend the Press has spent this year [holding the line](#) against exactly this kind of overreach, from rallying our coalition against the Nexstar-TEGNA deal to publicly challenging Chairman Carr's attempts to weaponize the Commission against broadcasters. Our members have filed comments, briefed lawmakers, and stood in solidarity with those resisting the administration's pressure campaign. We will not stand by while the FCC tries to dismantle a bedrock protection for local news and the consumers who rely on it.

Broadcasters are already telling Wall Street that consolidation is a profit engine built on higher retransmission fees, costs passed straight through to families as higher monthly TV bills. The frozen Nexstar-TEGNA merger, a deal worth more than \$6 billion that itself depends on gutting the cap, would put a single company's local stations within reach of [more than 80 percent](#) of the country. Eliminating the cap entirely would clear the runway for a wave of similar deals, each

one squeezing consumers harder in a time when affordability is already the defining issue for American households.

Every wave of consolidation brings layoffs in local newsrooms, syndicated programming replacing local reporting, and a narrowing of the viewpoints available to the public. The ownership cap exists precisely because a democracy depends on diverse, independent, locally accountable sources of news, not a homogenized national feed dictated from corporate headquarters. Weakening it hollows out local journalism at the very moment communities need it most.

"Our communities have watched this movie before. Every time these companies consolidate, the first casualties are local reporters, local stories, and local voices, and the first reward for consumers is a higher bill," said Brenda Castillo, President & CEO of the National Hispanic Media Coalition. "Eliminating this cap would accelerate that harm on a scale we've never seen, and it would do it while the FCC is leaning on broadcasters over coverage it doesn't like."

This move comes amid a broader pattern of the FCC and the administration pressuring broadcasters, including public threats against major networks and their local stations, such as Disney's ABC, over coverage they dislike. NHMC has [filed comments](#) in support of Disney and its ABC stations, standing against the administration's threats to their broadcast licenses, and we stand with any broadcaster willing to resist that intimidation. Consolidating ownership while simultaneously leaning on broadcasters is a dangerous combination because it concentrates power over the airwaves in fewer hands and makes independent journalism easier to intimidate.

[Defend the Press](#), a broad coalition of 25+ civic, civil rights, and media advocacy organizations, calls on the FCC to abandon any effort to eliminate the national television ownership cap, and urges Members of Congress to defend their own authority and hold the Commission accountable. Regulators should not be allowed to rewrite the law to serve corporate consolidation at the public's expense. The FCC's duty is to the American people — their wallets, their local news, and their right to a free and independent press.