

# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

## **Cable bill isn't community-friendly**

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If the 272 mayors of the Chicago region can agree with anything in the letter from state Rep. Jim Brosnahan and Sen. James Clayborne [March 15], it is that there should be more competition for cable and video services in Illinois. We respectfully disagree, however, that HB 1500 in its current form is the way to achieve it.

In our view, the proposed legislation has several significant shortcomings that can cause more harm than good for our residents. For example, the bill gives video companies the power to acquire property using eminent domain. It also states that they cannot be denied access to any private or public property.

These companies are providing entertainment services. They are not essential public utilities like electric or natural gas companies. Video competition legislation adopted in other states does not give video companies these powers. Why should Illinois?

HB 1500 states that video companies shall not deny access to potential residential subscribers because of race or income. But the bill requires residents to go to court if they believe they have been refused service because they have been redlined. Can people who are struggling to put food on their tables and roofs over their heads afford the attorneys and other costs needed to go to court? That's highly unlikely.

HB 1500 additionally mandates larger video companies to provide access to their services to at least 25 percent of the households in their service areas within three years after they begin providing service and 40 percent within six years. It does not, however, ensure compliance with these goals. Other states require video providers to file annual compliance reports with their public utility commissions and local governments. Illinois should, too.

Proponents of HB 1500 claim that it will bring competition, jobs and economic development to Illinois. However, should it be at the expense of property owners, low-income families, customer service and privacy protection rights and the ability of the state to make sure companies that will be given special legislative relief to provide video entertainment services are living up to their end of the bargain? We do not think so.

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