

VIEWPOINTS

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## Give fees to CAN

Public access station must get full amount from cable offerings

CAN TV is a scrappy little set of five channels.

Flip over to one the next time you're watching the tube. You might find an alderman getting harangued on a live call-in show or AIDS activists directing someone worried about infection to a neighborhood clinic where they can get tested. It's as entertaining as it is informative.

To say the network has been buffeted over the years by changes in cable regulations would be an understatement. CAN TV is funded largely by fees paid by the cable companies. In the late 1990s, the formula for funding CAN TV was changed, reflecting hoped-for cable competition that ultimately never materialized. The group's budget stagnated.

In 2007, the General Assembly passed into law a bill that allowed companies that want to sell cable to get authorized to do so by the state instead of individual cities. The state law requires the companies to pay a one percent fee for public access, educational and governmental affairs (as known as PEG) programming.

CAN TV is now is a bit of a rub with the city's Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Services over how those PEG monies the cable companies must pay will get spent. The city operates two channels of its own, and it wants half of the one percent fee. The other half would go to CAN TV.

It's as easy as any recommendation we've ever made to say that CAN TV should get the full one percent from state-authorized cable providers.

As AT&T - the one firm that has permission from the state to sell cable - ramps up its cable operations in Chicago, their PEG fees could go a long way in securing CAN TV's future, and allowing the group to expand its valuable offerings.

We encourage you to call your alderman and tell them to support Alderman Bernard Stone's CAN TV ordinance when it comes up for consideration on at the Committee on Finance on March 16.

If Stone's ordinance passes, CAN TV still must face down a number of challenges - the least of which is a brewing dispute with AT&T about ensuring CAN TV channels access to AT&T U-Verse cable system. Funding issues remain too. But securing the one percent from the state-authorized providers is a fine place to start improving the city's most unique local television station.