



For Immediate Release
April 8, 2008

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Cable Compromise Fair and Protects Consumers

The Tennessee Municipal League offered the following statement in response to the “Competitive Cable & Video Services Act.”

The Tennessee Municipal League is appreciative of the efforts of Speaker Naifeh, Chairman Curtiss, and Chairman Jones as well as the bill’s sponsors, Senator Ketron and Representative McDaniel, and the other legislators involved to break the stalemate and provide Tennesseans a choice in their cable provider without jeopardizing the rights and protections afforded consumers under law or without harming Tennessee communities.

Cities remain steadfast in our belief that the local franchising process has worked for nearly three decades and that the opportunity to compete is available to any cable or telephone provider. However, most cities have come to the realization that the General Assembly was intent on bringing the debate surrounding local franchising versus state franchising to an end this year. TML is appreciative of having been afforded a seat at the table and a voice in shaping this compromise legislation.

Tennessee’s cities and towns opposed last year’s bill because we believed it would have been a win for big corporations, but at the expense of consumers and communities. Through the efforts of Chairman Curtiss, Chairman Jones and the process provided by Speaker Naifeh, this compromise provides a fair resolution and ensures that consumers and communities won’t be road kill on the road to competition.

This bill is a compromise and any compromise is, by its very nature, imperfect. Cities won our share of arguments but we also lost some arguments. Left to our own devices, this is not the bill cities would have written, but the compromise offered today represents a victory for Tennessee’s consumers.

Local governments welcome competition and support the benefits that consumers might receive as a result of having another choice when selecting a cable television provider. Our goal has always been to ensure every Tennessean, especially those in smaller cities and towns and the more rural parts of this state, has access to quality cable or video service at affordable prices.

We believe that the changes made with respect to build-out requirements and consumer protections will prohibit “cherry-picking” or discrimination based on income or race and offer more Tennesseans the opportunity to have a choice in cable providers. In addition, the revisions made in the areas of customer service protections; local control of the public rights of way; public, education and government channels; and the preservation of local revenues have dramatically improved the bill.

The League supports the initiative to expand broadband into the underserved areas of the rural parts of the state, and believe it will enhance the quality of life for Tennesseans, as well as preserve and enhance economic development opportunities for our citizens.

We will continue to work with the Tennessee General Assembly to ensure a positive outcome for all those involved.