Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of	)	
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2022 Quadrennial Regulatory Review – Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996	)	MB Docket No. 22-459

COMMENTS OF SCREEN ACTORS GUILD–AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TELEVISION AND RADIO ARTISTS ("SAG-AFTRA")

via electronic filing

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About SAG-AFTRA

SAG-AFTRA is the world's largest labor union representing working media artists, including more than 160,000 actors, announcers, broadcasters, journalists, dancers, DJs, news writers, news editors, program hosts, puppeteers, recording artists, singers, stunt performers, voiceover artists, influencers and other media professionals across twenty-five (25) locals in the United States. The professionals represented by SAG-AFTRA are the faces and voices that entertain and inform America and the world. SAG-AFTRA exists to secure the strongest possible protections for media artists in the 21st century and beyond.

SAG-AFTRA represents professionals in audio and audiovisual entertainment and news media, including broadcast television and radio. With their interests in mind, SAG-AFTRA submits these comments to the Federal Communication Commission ("FTC" or "Commission") in connection with its 2022 Quadrennial Regulatory Review.[1]

Introduction

On September 30, 2025, the Commission announced it was initiating this proceeding to seek comment on "whether and how the media ownership rules serve the public interest in light of emerging technologies and constantly changing media marketplace conditions."[2] The three rules on which the Commission seeks comment are the Local Radio Ownership Rule (47 CFR § 73.3555(a)) ("Radio Rule"), the Local Television Multiple Ownership Rule (47 CFR § 73.3555(b)) ("Television

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[1] 2022 Quadrennial Regulatory Review—Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, MB Docket No. 22-459, 90 Fed. Reg. 51291 (Nov. 17, 2025) ("NPRM").

[2] Press Release, Federal Communication Commission, FCC Advances the 2022 Quadrennial Review of Broadcast Ownership Rules (Sep. 30, 2025), https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-advances-2022-quadrennial-review-broadcast-ownership-rules-0.

Rule”), and the Dual Network Rule (§ 47 CFR 73.658(g)) (collectively, the “Rules”). SAG-AFTRA’s comments focus primarily on the Television Rule and the Radio Rule, but much of the rationale also extends to the Dual Network Rule.

SAG-AFTRA believes the Rules remain necessary to serve the public interest and to “advance the agency's three traditional policy goals of competition, localism, and viewpoint diversity.”[3] The current media landscape is highly consolidated with a small number of conglomerates having expansive reach, leaving little room for competition. The Rules, therefore, serve a pro-competitive purpose within the television and radio markets. Given the existing scope of consolidation, relaxation of the Rules will undoubtedly jeopardize localism and viewpoint diversity and could result in job loss and economic harm, particularly in local markets.

Generally, the Media Ownership Rules “promote localism and competition by restricting the number of media outlets that a single entity may own or control within a geographic market and, in the case of broadcast television stations, nationwide.”[4] Support for the Rules’ crosses political lines, as illustrated by the wide range of viewpoints held by the parties referenced throughout the NPRM, or who have previously filed on this issue, expressing support for maintaining, strengthening, or studying them.

<u>The Current State of Media Ownership and Control</u>

The broadcast industry has already undergone significant consolidation, with a plurality of outlets being owned and/or controlled by a small, and shrinking, number of companies. According to one report, three large conglomerates—Gray Television, Nexstar Media Group, and Sinclair

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[3] NPRM at § 3.

[4] Congressional Research Service, Federal Communications Commission Media Ownership Rules (June 1, 2021) (citations omitted).

Broadcast Group—control roughly forty percent (40%) of television stations that produce local news and, collectively, they reach over eighty percent (80%) of the market.[5] Of their stations, approximately 100 are affiliated with one of the four major networks.[6]

According to recent data, Nexstar Media Group is the largest owner of broadcast stations with 114 owned stations covering 70 percent of the country (39.1% percent per FCC definitions).[7] According to public filings, Nexstar's total revenues for 2024 were $5.41 billion (an increase of nearly 10% over 2023), with net income totaling $722 million (more than double 2023) and a profit margin of 13%, exceeding the prior fiscal year.[8] Meanwhile, Nexstar is seeking to acquire the fourth-largest competitor, Tegna, which currently owns 68 stations. [9] This would significantly expand Nexstar's already unprecedented reach.

Double-digit profit margins and the financial ability to acquire competitors in the same market is hardly indicative of a company that is struggling to compete in today's market. On the contrary, it

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[5] Gregory J. Martin, *et al*, *Media Consolidation*, Kilts Center at Chicago Booth Marketing Data Center Paper (forthcoming) (May 28, 2024) at 2, *available at:* http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4951078.

[6] Amy Merrick, How Media Consolidation Affects the News You See, Chicago Booth Review (Mar. 04, 2025), https://www.chicagobooth.edu/review/how-media-consolidation-affects-news-you-see.

[7] Harry A. Jessell, *Nexstar Again Tops Station Groups as Consolidation Prospects Grow* TVNewsCheck (Aug. 5, 2025), https://tvnewscheck.com/business/article/nexstar-again-tops-station-groups-as-consolidation-prospects-grow/; Rick Ducey, Top Local TV Groups Revealed, but M&A May Change the Usual Line-Up for Next Year, BIA Advisory Services (Aug. 19, 2025), https://www.bia.com/blog/top-local-tv-groups-revealed-but-ma-may-change-the-usual-line-up/.

When combined with partner stations, Nexstar currently controls over 200 stations. *See* Ryan Krull, Tegna purchase could lead to layoffs or consolidation in St. Louis newsrooms, St. Louis Magazine (Aug. 20, 2025), https://www.stlmag.com/news/tegna-nexstar-purchase-st-louis/;

[8] Simply Wall St., *Nexstar Media Group Full Year 2024 Earnings: EPS Misses Expectations*, Yahoo! Finance (Feb. 28, 2025), https://finance.yahoo.com/news/nexstar-media-group-full-2024-110454129.html.

[9] Krull, *supra* n. 7.

is illustrative of the very kind of consolidation the Rules are intended to prevent to preserve competition in the market.

The Media Ownership Rules Are Pro-Competitive

The Rules must be considered in the unique context in which broadcast television and radio operate. The broadcast industry and associated markets differ quite significantly from most others, including other media and entertainment markets. As public trustees of the airwaves, the competitive focus for market participants must be on serving the public interest, not maximizing corporate and shareholder profits. As the Commission has repeatedly reiterated "the one constant that remains is the duty of broadcast licensees to serve the public interest."[10]

One way of assessing competition is through Michael Porter's "five forces" framework. [11] The framework examines the five "competitive forces" that shape rivalry and profitability: (1) barriers to entry, (2) rivalry among existing firms, (3) buyer power, (4) supplier power, and (5) substitutes.[12] These forces are assessed together as an integrated framework by first evaluating each force separately, then weigh them collectively to judge the overall intensity of competitive pressure. Porter's five forces are not without their criticism in the strategy literature, but they provide a useful tool in this context.

Porter's first force, barriers to entry, is particularly applicable to broadcasting, which depends on the exclusive use of a scarce public resource. The structural limits and scarcity function as a meaningful and durable barrier to entry, preventing local broadcast markets from "self-correcting"

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[10] NPRM, § 29.

[11] *See* Michael Porter, *The five competitive forces that shape strategy*, Harv. Bus. Rev, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 78-93.

[12] *Id.*

through new entrants the way many other markets do. To address this force, among others, Congress conditioned broadcast licenses on service to the public interest, providing licensees use of the airwaves, but not ownership.[13]

With entry constrained, preserving competition in today's environment depends on preserving legitimate rivalry among the existing licensees and preventing any one owner from gaining leverage over key "buyer" relationships (such as local advertisers and even viewers) and other market forces. Seen through that lens, the Media Ownership Rules are pro-competitive. They help ensure meaningful rivalry among incumbents in markets where the number of viable outlets is inherently limited. They also help limit owners ability to gain outsized leverage over buyers (e.g. local advertisers) and over key inputs/suppliers (e.g., network affiliation relationships and high-value programming). Further, they reduce the risk that consolidation turns "competition" into nothing more than cost-cutting and centralized decision-making that diminishes investment in genuinely local coverage. While the threat of substitutes (Porter's fifth force), particularly from digital and online media is very real, in the broadcast context it does not automatically replicate the competitive constraints that matter most for the public interest broadcasters are meant to serve.

Zimmer Radio of Mid-Missouri v. FCC[14] underscores why this kind of grounded, force-by-force competitive analysis should matter in connection with this rulemaking. The Eighth Circuit accepted that the Commission may conclude that non-broadcast competition, standing alone, is insufficient to achieve the public-interest objectives historically associated with broadcasting, and it deferred to the

[13] *See, e.g., Red Lion Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. FCC*, 395 U.S. 367, 383 (1969) *quoting* S.Rep. No. 562, 86th Cong., 1st Sess., 8-9 (1959) (recognizing that the broadcast frequences are limited and, therefore, are considered a public trust, thus mandating licensees to operate in the public interest).

[14] 145 F.4th 828 (8th Cir. 2025).

FCC's market definitions where the agency provided a rational explanation.[15] But the court made clear the Commission must ground its decisions in evidence on the record and reasoned explanation.[16] Further, the FCC may repeal or modify a rule only if it first determines the rule is no longer necessary in the public interest; if the FCC finds a rule remains necessary, "the inquiry and the FCC's authority end."[17]

Applying *Zimmer Radio*, therefore, the Commission would need to assess how competition in broadcast actually functions in the market in light of the industry's entry barriers, buyer/supplier dynamics, and substitutes, and then show how the ownership rules no longer serve the public interest within that real-world competitive structure. In that context, the Rules are pro-competitive, and a finding that they are unnecessary is not warranted under current market conditions.

The Rules remain an important tool for preserving competition. Notably, they help prevent a small number of companies from accumulating outsized control over the highest-reach local outlets, particularly in markets where the number of stations is inherently limited. They help preserve real choices for local advertisers and help ensure communities get meaningful local news by reducing the risk that consolidation turns "competition" into cost-cutting, centralized decision-making, and less investment in truly local coverage. They also ensure there remain alternatives when station owners in a market decide to make dramatic changes to local programming, particularly local newscasts.[18]

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[15] *Id.*

[16] *Id.* at 847-50, quoting *Balt. Gas & Elec. Co. v. Nat. Res. Def. Council, Inc.*, 462 U.S. 87, 105 (1983) (holding that the FCC had "considered the relevant factors and articulated a rational connection between the facts found and the choice made").

[17] *Id.* at 859.

[18] Martin, *et al*, *supra*, n. 5.

In order to ensure a competitive environment that promotes a wide range of local news and information, it is important that the Commission remain committed to maintaining the media ownership rules to uphold and further the aims of the Commission.

<u>The Importance of Local Control to Localism and Viewpoint Diversity</u>

Relaxation of the Rules would threaten to jeopardize localism and local viewpoint diversity. The prevalence of broadcast as a source for local news exemplifies the importance of local broadcast ownership. Despite the availability of other media, countless viewers still tune into local news, information, and entertainment programming. This programming remains a crucial source for local information, whether it is for news or information about local activities and events, politics, emergencies, or other information specific to the community.

The importance of local broadcast, generally, and local news, specifically, is particularly notable during local crises, when they can be a lifeline for local residents. During the January 2025 fires that forced 200,000 Los Angeles residents from their homes, local news was an indispensable source of critical information.[19] According to Nielsen's data, local viewers watched 1.1 billion minutes of local TV news during a single day, while local radio listeners listened to more than 97 million gross minutes that day.[20]

Other research shows that broadcast media, and broadcast news, in particular, remain popular. Research shows that broadcast television, in particular, remains a critical source for local news. In a 2024 study, Pew Research Center found that almost two-thirds (64%) of Americans get their local

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[19] *Id.*

[20] *Id.*

from television news "often or sometimes," with just over half getting it from radio.[21] The only source that ranked higher was "friends, family, and neighbors."[22]

Notably, Americans continue to trust broadcast television for local news more than other source, particularly compared to online media.[23] Pew's research found it to be the most trusted form of local news, with more than three quarters (76%) of Americans expressing a fair amount to a great deal of trust.[24] According to Nielsen, 57% of viewers ranked local news among their top three most trusted outlets.[25] By contrast, less than half of those surveyed trust online news.[26] Critically, surveys show that Americans trust local news (70%) to a far greater extent than national news (56%), with trust in national news declining by 11 percentage points since March of 2025 and 20 points since 2016.[27] These figures vary slightly among age demographics, with the highest trust coming from those aged

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[21] Elisa Shearer, et al, *Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News*, Pew Research Center, (May 7, 2024), https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/05/07/sources-of-local-news/. A similar number, 52% get their news from social media. *Id.* Only a third of Americans *prefer* to get their news from television, but this is still higher than those who choose news websites or apps (26%) or social media (23%). *Id.*

[22] *Id.*

[23] Danilo Yanich and Benjamin E. Bagozzi, Reusing the News:Duplicating Local TV Content, University of Delaware, (Aug. 2025), *available at* https://www.reusingthenews.org/.

[24] *Id.*; Shearer, *supra*, n. 21.

[25] *The LA Fires: How Multiplatform Local Media Became a Lifeline*, Nielsen (Feb. 2025), https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2025/la-fires-multiplatform-local-media-tv-radio-lifeline/. Nielsen found that a significant majority (85%) of Americans "believe local news outlets are at least somewhat important to the well-being of their local community," with nearly half (44%) expressing it is "extremely or very important." *Id.*

[26] Yanich and Bagozzi, *supra* n. 23.

[27] Kirsten Eddy and Elisa Shearer, *How Americans' trust in information from news organizations and social media sites has changed over time*, Pew Research Center, (Oct. 29, 2025), https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/29/how-americans-trust-in-information-from-news-organizations-and-social-media-sites-has-changed-over-time/ (indicating the percent of respondents who have a lot of/some trust).

65+ (76% for local media vs. 62% national).[28] Even among the 18-29 year old demographic, trust is high, with 65% expressing trust in local news versus 51% who trust national news.[29] This contrast between local and national news is stark and illustrates the need to maintain local control over local content.

While different broadcast conglomerates pursue different strategies, studies have shown that local coverage changes when a station is acquired by a conglomerate. This has been most studied in connection with acquisitions by Sinclair where studies have shown immediate declines in local coverage.[30] According to the research, over time, the decline in coverage becomes even more significant.[31]

In its findings about local viewership during the Los Angeles Fires, Nielsen concluded with following the reflection: "local television and local radio don't just inform, they build community, combat misinformation and drive unmatched engagement."[32] That statement succinctly sums up the importance of maintaining local control over local information and, consequently, the importance of the Media Ownership Rules.

The Commission asked if there are "other measures" it could take "to allow broadcast licensees to continue serving the public interest while facing robust cross-platform competition."[33] The reality is that many licensees already engage in other businesses that allow them to compete across multiple

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[28] *Id.*

[29] *Id.*

[30] Martin, *Media Consolidation*, *supra* n. 5.

[31] *Id.*

[32] *Id.*

[33] NPRM, § 29.

platforms. For example, in its discussion of the L.A. fires, Nielsen noted that the local stations engage in multiplatform strategies, which they call "convergence TV," referring to "streaming complement[ing] the strength of linear TV." [34] These strategies allow stations to reach broader audiences, including outside of their traditional broadcast hours. It also provides additional sources of revenue through advertising and subscriptions, among others. Further, BIA reports that retransmission fees comprised over one-third (36.8%) of revenue for the top 25 stations in its rankings.[35]

Impacts on Local Employment and Economies

Elimination or relaxation of the Rules risks detrimental impacts on employment, particularly in smaller markets. This has been seen during past periods of deregulation and, particularly, as a result of media consolidation. To achieve the economies of scale the companies claim are necessary, conglomerates often centralize work and content production operations that were once the responsibility of local stations. The losses are not limited to those who work directly in television and radio, but flow to local businesses, further impacting the local economy.

While many media entities continue to post high profits, these same entities are compressing wages and eliminating jobs, including those once held by SAG-AFTRA members.[36] In local television, news employment has been trending down, with the latest RTDNA/Newhouse survey reporting total full-time local TV news employment of 27,066 in 2024, a 2.9% decline from the prior

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[34] Nielsen*, supra* n. 25.

[35] Ducey, *supra*, n. 7.

[36] See, e.g., *Local TV news employment moves down … along with hiring*, Radio Television Digital News Ass'n (Sep. 5, 2025), https://www.rtdna.org/news/local-tv-news-employment-moves-down--along-with-hiring (reporting the results of recent surveys on local TV news employment).

year, and down 3.3% from the 2021 peak.[37] RTDNA also notes that layoffs affecting major station groups were already underway and continued into 2025, reinforcing that cost pressure and restructuring are translating into fewer newsroom jobs on the ground.[38]

Radio news staffing is also shrinking. RTDNA reports that in 2025 the typical (median) radio news operation has just one full-time news staffer, and the average operation fell to 3.2 full-timers (down by 0.5 year-over-year), with part-time staffing also edging down; declines appear across major, medium, and small markets.[39] Consistent with consolidation/centralization trends, RTDNA reports that multi-station groups' use of centralized newsrooms rose to 78.2%.[40] For context, in May 2024, the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated there were about 52,680 jobs in radio broadcasting stations, including 1,830 "news analysts, reporters, and journalists" and 13,710 "broadcast announcers and radio disc jockeys," work that may be covered by SAG-AFTRA.[41]

Additionally, consolidation can shift how local broadcast advertising markets work in ways that may harm local economies, especially in smaller markets. A recent empirical study of major station-group acquisitions finds that conglomerate owners increase advertising duration during local, although it varies across the conglomerates.[42] The study found that two of the largest conglomerates increased ad duration during local newscasts, and that one specifically increased sales to multi-

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[37] Id.

[38] *Id*.

[39] RTDNA, News Staffs Are Shrinking at U.S. Radio Stations, Radio Television Digital News Ass'n (Sept. 3, 2025), https://www.rtdna.org/news/staffing-is-decreasing-among-radio-stations

[40] *Id*.

[41] U.S. Bureau of Lab. Stat., *Broadcasting BLS statistics on Radio Day*, TED: The Economics Daily (Aug. 20, 2025), https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2025/broadcasting-bls-statistics-on-radio-day.htm.

[42] Martin, *Media Consolidation*, *supra* n. 5.

market advertisers while decreasing duration for single-market advertisers (i.e., local-only buyers).[43] In particular, Sinclair and Nexstar increase ad duration by roughly 6.4% and 4.3%, respectively.[44]

The same study finds that for Sinclair, in particular, these gains were driven by multi-market advertisers, while the estimated effects for ads sold to local-only advertisers were negative.[45] The research seems to indicate that in small markets, the easiest revenue growth lever after consolidation may be selling up the chain to regional or national advertisers, not cultivating local advertisers.[46] In practice, that kind of sales strategy can leave local merchants facing fewer prime slots, less attention from locally empowered station decisionmakers, and more “bundle-first” selling. It can also reduce access to discounted “remnant” inventory—unsold time that is often available at lower prices and can be an entry point for smaller advertisers.

While this NPRM is about broadcast, the newspaper industry illustrates how consolidation and can contribute to local economic harm through newsroom reductions, shared content, and centralized production. At least one highly cited finance paper finds that when local newspapers close, municipal borrowing costs rise by 5–11 basis points, increasing costs to taxpayers, with links to reduced monitoring and weaker accountability.[47] Further, many parts of the countries have been termed “news deserts” due to the elimination of local media, particularly print. In these areas, in particular, local broadcast news takes on a greater importance.

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[43] *Id.*

[44] *Id.*

[45] *Id.*

[46] Merrick, supra n. 6.

[47] Gao, Pengjie and Lee, Chang and Murphy, Dermot, Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance (February 12, 2019). Journal of Financial Economics, (2020) vol. 135, no. 2, 445-467, available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3175555.

Ultimately, the same efficiencies that help big groups realize economies of scale and cost savings effectively externalize costs onto local labor markets and local commercial ecosystems. The combination of national reach plus conglomerate ownership and centralized operations cause jobs to leave local communities, lead to bundle-based ad sales that favor multi-market advertisers over local advertisers, and raise local market power concerns, particularly where a company owns two of the top local outlets.

If the Rules are eliminated or relaxed, the large media entities will continue to amass holdings in television and radio stations, resulting in fewer jobs and harm to local economies.

Conclusion

As illustrated above, the Radio Rule and Television Rule remain necessary, perhaps more so than ever, to "promote localism and competition," and to further the public interest. Further consolidation and loss of localism can have devastating effects, not just on the content we see and hear, but on jobs and local economies. Consolidation leads to job loss. The loss of localism erodes the quality of local programming for the public and increases problems that arise from having fewer independent news sources and editorial perspectives in news coverage. The Rules, further, serve a pro-competitive purpose, ensuring companies can compete within the market in which they operate.

For the foregoing reasons, SAG-AFTRA encourages the Commission to keep these Rules in place.

Respectfully Submitted,

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