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Council on Aging/Senior Center

18 Pond Street Rear – Ayer, Massachusetts - 01432
Katie Petrossi, Ph.D., Director

Tel: 978-772-8260
kpetrossi@ayer.ma.us

January 18, 2023

To: Cable Advisory Committee

Re: The importance of public access television for seniors

As your committee undertakes the very important work of renegotiating Ayer's Comcast contract, I request that you prioritize the needs of our seniors. Current trends in the way we consume information and entertainment are leaving many seniors behind, increasing the need to keep cable affordable and support public access television for our most vulnerable citizens.

Older adults are typically no longer working and tend to watch more television than working adults. Cable TV and public access television affords opportunities to stay connected with local government by watching various Board & Committee meetings. Collaborations between the APAC and the Senior Center can bring valuable fitness and educational content to homebound seniors and encourages seniors to attend Senior Center events. Cable programming helps seniors stay informed about national events and provides opportunities for intellectual stimulation and entertainment. Sitcoms, documentaries, and news channel banter create shared experiences and common ground (or basis for debate) for social interactions amongst seniors and helps to counteract the impacts of isolation.

Despite its growing popularity amongst younger people, many seniors cannot afford the ever-increasing number of premium channels and streaming services. Beyond the monthly subscription costs, additional requirements to enjoy these services such as home internet access and upgraded equipment such as smart TVs price many seniors out of this content. Additionally, tech literacy prevents many seniors from accessing and maintaining these services (as well as enjoying alternatives such as free/fair use content platforms like YouTube). As a result, seniors rely on cable and we need to keep it affordable for them. While internet access is outside the scope of today's hearing, cable and internet are often bundled together, whereby getting behind in payments on one service impacts access to the other. Lack of access to all that the internet provides creates what is known as the "digital divide." This phenomenon has been well-studied as a social determinant of health. Access to affordable cable & internet affects not only entertainment options, but whether seniors can access telehealth appointments, apply for senior housing or rental assistance, switch Medicare plans, and visit with friends & family living far away.

The Ayer Senior Center wishes to thank the Cable Advisory Committee for their efforts to keep cable affordable, provide discounts to seniors, and fully fund APAC so that they can bring quality programming to Ayer seniors.