



NEWS

**Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554**

News media information 202 / 418-0500
TTY 202 / 418-2555
Fax-On-Demand 202 / 418-2830
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
<ftp.fcc.gov>

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**News Media contact:
Alex Johns at (202) 418-2000**

FCC COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS ANNOUNCES TWO NEW MEDIA CONCENTRATION HEARINGS; CALLS FOR PROTECTION FOR FEARFUL WITNESSES

Commissioner Michael Copps today stated that “in order to increase public access to the Commission before the most important decision we will make this year, I am announcing two field hearings on media concentration – one in Seattle in early March at the University of Washington; and a second in Durham, North Carolina later in March at Duke University.”

Copps’ remarks came as he delivered the McGannon Lecture on Communications Policy and Ethics at Fordham University. He explained, “I have invited each of the other Commissioners to these hearings, which will give us the opportunity to receive testimony from interested parties in regions directly impacted by our decisions. I think that talking to citizens in places like Washington State and North Carolina is needed before we can make an informed decision. We can’t pretend everyone reads the Federal Register or has lobbyists to make their voice heard at the FCC. We have a responsibility to reach out.”

Commissioner Copps also called for the FCC to establish a special procedure to combat retribution against those who testify against media consolidation. “It has been a revelation to me that there are media professionals with strong feelings about the downsides of consolidation for the American people who are afraid to speak for fear of retribution. I hear privately that speaking out on this issue would cost many people their careers. If this is true then we need to find a way for them to be heard without fear of retribution. I am working with my fellow Commissioners to establish an anonymous testimony procedure for any producer, writer, musician, actor, broadcaster, or other media professional who feels threatened. I recognize that this presents challenges for a public proceeding, but so, too, does a climate of fear that chokes off needed input for important decisions.”

At issue is the FCC’s review of rules that seek to protect localism, independence, and diversity in the media. These rules, among other things, currently limit a single corporation from dominating local TV markets; from merging a community’s TV stations, radio stations, and newspaper; from merging two of the major TV networks; and from controlling more than 35% of all TV households in the nation. Chairman Michael Powell has announced that the Commission will vote on whether to fully or partially eliminate these rules this spring.