[US] The Communications Act of 1995

IRIS 1995-8:1/33

Ad van Loon
European Audiovisual Observatory

In the USA a major amendment to the Federal Communications Act of 1934 is currently being debated in Congress on the basis of House proposal H.R. 1555: The Communications Act of 1995. The proposed changes are numerous and a coherent version of all changes proposed was not yet published. Recently, however, Prof. David Rice managed to compose a relatively comprehensive Bill by cutting and pasting the different proposals which are available in electronic form on computer networks. This version is now available at the Observatory.

The changes proposed concern the development of competitive telecommunications markets (whilst preserving universal service), cable communications competitiveness (cable service provided by telephone companies) and broadcast communications competitiveness.

The latter contains a prohibition on limitation of any form of ownership or other interest in two or more broadcasting stations or networks or in a broadcasting station or network and any other medium of mass communication unless expressly permitted by the Act. One of the provisions proposed prohibits a person or entity from obtaining any licence if such licence would result in such person or entity directly or indirectly owning, operating, controlling, or having a cognizable interest in, television stations which have an aggregate national audience reach exceeding 35 percent. Another proposed provision prohibits a person or entity from obtaining any licence if such licence would result in such person or entity dirctly or indirectly owning, operating, controlling, or having a cognizable interest in, two or more television stations within the same television market (unless one of these stations is a UHF station or if the acquirement of or participation in an additional UHF station would not harm competition relations). Moreover, it is proposed that in a proceeding to grant new, or authorize the assignment of any station license, the application mahy be denied if the combination of such station and more than one other nonbroadcast media of mass communication would result in an undue concentration of media voices in the respective local market. The application would not be granted if all the media of mass communication in such local market would be owned, operated or controlled by two or fewer persons or entities. However, persons or entities may not be required to divest itself of any portion of any combination of stations and other media of mass communications that such person or entity owns, operates or controls unless such person or entity acquires qnother station or other media of mass communications

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

in such local market. The Act, if adopted, will also establish a television rating code and require distributors to transmit such rating to the public so as to enable parents to block the display of video programming that they have determined is inappropriate for their children. In regards to this, a provision is proposed requiring manufacturers of televisions to equip such apparatus with circuitry designed to enable viewers to block display of all programmes with a common rating.

Information on law related policy developments which may have legal consequences but of which no documents or other texts are available yet.

H.R. 1555, The Communications Act of 1995, amending the Federal Comunications Act of 1934 (summary).

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026