

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN THOMAS E. WHEELER**

Re: *Revisions to Public Inspection File Requirements – Broadcaster Correspondence File and Cable Principal Headend Location*, MB Docket No. 16-161.

In recent years, the Commission has adopted multiple updates to our rules requiring television and radio licensees to maintain public inspection files, which disclose community-relevant information such as political advertising sold and data on ownership and equal employment opportunities. Most notably, we adopted rules to make the so-called “public file” available online, rather than being squirreled away in a file cabinet at the actual TV and radio stations.

Although the central thrust of these changes has been to make the so-called “public file” more accessible to the public, we also consistently sought to minimize the burdens on licensees throughout these process reforms. At the request of Commissioner O’Rielly, the January 2016 *Expanded Online Public File Order* asked questions about whether certain requirements should be eliminated. The Commission staff has completed its review, and, consistent with its findings, this item proposes striking two outdated public file obligations.

First, we propose eliminating the requirement that commercial broadcast stations retain and make available to the public the letters and emails they receive regarding operation of the station. The original goal of the correspondence file requirement was to ensure that commercial broadcasters comply with their public interest obligation to air programming that is responsive to the needs and interests of their community of license. However, as consumers change the way they communicate with the world, it has become less common for them to write a letter or send an email to their local station. Instead, like most of us, consumers interact with their favorite stations via social media. And for those who would like to share information with the Commission about a station, that option remains available. Hence, the item tentatively concluded this requirement is no longer needed to serve its intended purpose.

Removing these public inspection file requirements would enable commercial broadcasters and cable operators to make their entire public inspection file available online and dispense with the need to maintain local public files. This should enable such broadcasters to lock their doors and redeploy resources once used to help the public access the file at the station.

The second obligation recommended for elimination is the requirement that cable operators publicly disclose the location of their control center for receiving and processing television signals. Some cable operators raised concerns that making information about the location of these control centers – or headends -- available online poses a potential security risk. The Commission’s review couldn’t identify any reason that the general public would need to know the location of a cable system’s principal headend, and we accordingly propose removing this rule.

However, we recognize that the designation and location of the principal headend must be made available to certain entities, including the FCC and local television stations. That’s why this item seeks comment on how principal headend information should be collected by the FCC and made available to those entities that need it.

These recommendations are not only part of a broader effort to update our public file rules, they are consistent with our agency-wide process reform initiative to review all Commission regulations and update or repeal outdated and unnecessary rules.

Thank you to the Media Bureau for their work on this item and to Commissioner O’Rielly for championing the specific proposals in this item.