

# PUBLIC ACCESS IN SAN FRANCISCO AT SERIOUS AND IMMEDIATE RISK

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## **What's Happening...**

The operational grant funding that has sustained access since Access San Francisco opened its doors in 1999 is ending. Access San Francisco has been funded since 1999 by a renewable annual grant agreement from the City. Our grant agreement expires June 2009. Furthermore, due to recent changes in state video franchising law (called "DIVCA"), the City will no longer be able to collect access grant funds from the local cable operators which the City has used to fund access operations these past years. The Department of Telecommunications and Information Services (DTIS), the city department that oversees access and manages funding and grant agreements, has taken the position that access needs to be run on far less operational money (approximately \$600,000 per year less, which represents about a 75% reduction in our current operational budget). Reducing operational funding by \$600K annually will kill access as we know it.

DTIS has created and is implementing a "Request for Information & Comment" (RFI/C) process. Through this process, DTIS is collecting data on public access usage trends, which it then intends to use to come up with alternative ideas on how to provide access on far less money. They are asking access stakeholders how access can change or should change. Are you okay with seeing the studios going away? Or with checkout equipment and editing going away? Or with training and production assistance and support going away? Or with access being comprised of YouTube?

If the City does not identify an alternative source of funding for access, access will be closing its doors on June 30, 2009. While traditional grant funding revenue to the City is ending, the City does still have other sources of cable-related income – primarily the 5% of gross revenues franchise fees it continues to collect for local cable operators. This 5% franchise fee brings many millions of dollars of revenue to the City each year, and is the source of funding the City could be and should be using to fund access. This is the message we need to bring to the Mayor and the Supervisors. A portion of the 5% franchise fee needs to be dedicated to fund access, as it is done in many other cities. Right now by City ordinance, the City uses .2% to help fund access. That ordinance needs to be updated from .2% to at least 1%. 1% would fully fund access now, and would protect its future as a sustainable funding source. The City can continue to keep the remaining percentage of the franchise fees to add to its general fund.

## **What You Can Do...**

- Educate yourself on the issues. Ask questions of access staff. Ask questions of City staff. Read postings and survey responses at the City's website: [http://sfgov.org/site/publicaccess\\_index.asp](http://sfgov.org/site/publicaccess_index.asp)
- Take the City's on-line public access TV survey, and through your survey responses, tell the City how and why access is important to you. Use the last open-ended question #16 to tell the City how you feel about the potential defunding and loss of access, and why this matters to you personally, and why it should matter to the city as a valuable public interest asset. If you've already taken the survey, you can add additional comments by emailing directly to: [PublicAccessTV@SFGOV.org](mailto:PublicAccessTV@SFGOV.org)
- Help spread the word and rally support from everyone: other producers, viewers, guests on your show, and anyone in San Francisco who has a stake in the survival of public access.
- Make local non-profits and other community groups aware of what's at risk, and ask for their support. In addition to individuals, organizational support will be critical. Send us their contact information.
- Be prepared and committed in the weeks and months ahead to send letters when necessary, or to attend critical public meetings when announced.
- Know who your City supervisor is (see reverse), and start crafting a concise one-page letter, explaining how we're at risk and ask for his or her help to protect funding and the future of access. Make sure they realize that without his or her intervention, access as we know it will end June 2009. Remind him or her that public access is not just simply a free speech forum, but that it's a thriving community center, and in our new age consolidated corporately controlled media, its one of the last local non-commercial forms of community-accessible media. The local channels are a valuable public interest asset worth protecting.

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**City Hall**  
**1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 244**  
**San Francisco, CA 94102-4689**

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 TDD/TTY (415) 554-5227

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MIRKARIMI, Ross	5	4-7630	4-7634	282	Ross.Mirkarimi@sfgov.org	Delepine, Boris	Galbreath, Rick Brown, Vallie
PESKIN, Aaron	3	4-7450	4-7454	256	Aaron.Peskin@sfgov.org	Noyola, David	Chung, Rose
SANDOVAL, Gerardo	11	4-6975	4-6979	264	Gerardo.Sandoval@sfgov.org	Kinsey, Nick	Klipp, Luke

City's Internet site: [www.sfgov.org](http://www.sfgov.org)

Board of Supervisors general email address: [board.of.supervisors@sfgov.org](mailto:board.of.supervisors@sfgov.org)

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