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Pitcairn (Allegheny Co.) residents who use the borough's cable and Internet service will likely see an increase in their bills beginning in January. The proposed budget includes a monthly increase of \$5 each for basic cable and Internet services. Residents who have the basic Internet and cable packages will see a \$10 increase.

Customers with premium channels HBO and Showtime will see an additional \$3 increase for each. Right now, basic cable alone costs \$55 per month. Internet service alone costs almost \$58. Premium channels HBO and Showtime carry an additional fee of about \$15 each. Cable and Internet packages range from about \$70 to \$132. Dietz said the total budget for the services is \$450,000. The rate increases would bring in about \$37,000.

Dietz said it costs the borough around \$329,000 a year to offer cable and Internet. That number is only for the costs of programming and transmission. It doesn't include the costs of materials for installation, repairs or manpower. Dietz also said some programming costs could go up more than 300 percent next year. She said because more people are moving to online streaming, the costs of cable programming have gone up to offset the revenue lost to online programming. "We have no idea how high they'll go," she said.

Council President Jack Bova said the hike in cable and Internet rates is due to the expenses of paying for programming and maintaining the system, which was created in the 1950s. "I wish there was a way to do this without raising fees," Bova said. He said the borough isn't legally allowed to use general fund money for the cable and Internet expenses. Council discussed in September whether the borough should consider spending \$40,000 to \$50,000 on repairs to the system. Dietz said the rate increase for next year would not fund those improvements and would only be to keep the existing services going. – *Monroeville (Allegheny Co.) Times-Express*

The National Cable & Telecommunications Association has asked the FCC to ban

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broadcasters from blocking viewers' access to their programming online to increase their leverage in retransmission consent negotiations.

Cable's principal trade group said that the practice was "unfair" and a violation of broadcasters' obligation under current rules to negotiate for retrans fees in good faith. The request came in the FCC's proceeding to determine whether any of its retrans rules need modification. The FCC launched the proceeding earlier this year at the request of Congress.

The NAB and individual station groups have asked the FCC not to make any changes to the rules. "Some broadcast stations are owned by entities that also offer websites and online content that are generally available on the Internet to anyone with a broadband connection," NCTA explained. "That content may include some of the same programming that appears on their broadcast stations, which may be offered simultaneously with its transmission over the air by broadcast stations or on an on-demand basis. But the availability of such online programming to ISP customers typically has nothing to do with the contractual relationship between cable operators and broadcasters and is completely extraneous to retransmission consent negotiations.

"In these circumstances, the targeted blocking of a broadcaster's online services to any of a cable operator's broadband customers as a negotiating tactic in order to pressure the operator to accept the broadcaster's terms and conditions for retransmission consent should be deemed to violate the duty to negotiate in good faith. "As the commission has noted, such online blocking unfairly harms consumers who have no relationship to the dispute between the broadcast station and the cable operator," NCTA said.

In addition, the group said: "But whether or not the unfair effect on consumers should, in itself, render blocking of online content by either side a violation of the good faith requirement, what makes such blocking by broadcasters particularly unfair is that it is a one-sided tactic that cable operators and other ISPs are already barred from using. The commission's 'Open Internet' rules flatly prohibit cable operators and other broadband Internet service providers from blocking access to lawful content on the Internet. In these circumstances, allowing broadcasters alone to block such content to obtain bargaining leverage would distort rather than ensure good faith negotiations." – **TV NewsCheck**

Now averaging about one ex parte filing a week, Dish Network targeted the Bright House Networks piece of Charter Communications' aggressive cable acquisition spree in its latest query to the FCC. "The lack of a causal nexus between the merger and the benefits is particularly stark in the case of Bright House Networks," said Dish attorney Stephanie Roy. "Under its existing partnership with Time Warner Cable, Bright House is already positioned to complete deployment of its next generation network in a timely fashion."

Analysts expect wrangling with state public utilities commissions and various other regulatory bodies will extend the closure of the three-way merger between Charter, Bright House and TWC into as late as the middle of next year. However, the consensus is that the deals lack the opposition endured by the previously unsuccessful Comcast-TWC merger attempt, and they'll likely be consummated. Dish, however, has emerged as the most strident critic of the two Charter acquisition deals, releasing a flurry of ex parte memos to the FCC in recent weeks.

In its latest heavily redacted letter, Dish said that Bright House is already offering advanced 300 Mbps services to its customers and is "well-positioned" to proliferate higher-speed services across its footprint. "Put simply, it is unclear what Charter's management of Bright House will do to improve upon Bright House's existing and ongoing network deployment plans," Roy said. "Additionally, and as noted in Dish's reply, it would not be a benefit for Bright House customers to be forced to pay for a higher speed tier of 60 Mbps without a lower cost alternative."

Charter spokesman Justin Venech said the MSO had no comment on Dish's letter. But he did release this statement: "New Charter's many commitments, including to provide faster broadband service without data caps or modem fees, establish industry leading interconnection policies, offer advanced video services, increase competition in the SMB and enterprise business markets, and return thousands of overseas jobs to the U.S., puts this transaction squarely in the public interest." – **Fierce Cable**



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