

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

1030

December 4, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

In light of the Federal Communications Commission's recent action to loosen local television ownership rules, and the commission's ongoing review of the pending merger between Sinclair Broadcast Group and Tribune Media Company, I write to share my concerns about the negative impact these actions could have on the St. Louis television market.

While I appreciate that in adopting its broadcast ownership order last month the commission did not eliminate the prohibition on a broadcaster owning more than one of the top four television stations in a market, I am concerned about the change that was adopted allowing a broadcaster to seek approval on a case-by-case basis for transactions that would violate this rule.

In the St. Louis market, the 21st largest in the country and the largest in the state of Missouri, Sinclair currently owns KDNL, the ABC affiliate, while Tribune owns KTVI, the Fox affiliate, as well as KPLR, an affiliate of the CW. If the Sinclair-Tribune transaction is approved as proposed it would leave three stations in the hands of one company, including two of the top four stations in the market.

Sinclair has been in the St. Louis television market since 1996, and on October 12, 2001 eliminated its local newscasts on KDNL. With the exception of a brief return to airing a local newscast through a partnership with the local NBC affiliate in 2011-2013, Sinclair's ABC affiliate in St. Louis has been without a newscast for most of the past 16 years and remains the only affiliate of a top four network in a media market of St. Louis' size without a newscast.

Although a recent filing with the commission by Sinclair indicates the company would agree to add newscasts at KDNL if the Sinclair-Tribune transaction is approved, the gesture is too little too late from a company that has demonstrated a stunning disregard for local news and the viewers who rely on it in the St. Louis market.

Other recent broadcast mergers have highlighted the importance of enforcing the commission's rule on this matter. The Department of Justice required the sale of a station in the St. Louis market as a condition of the Gannett-Belo transaction in 2013, blocking one company from owning two of the top four stations in the market.

With regard to the St. Louis television market, I urge you to strictly enforce the prohibition on a broadcaster owning more than one top four television station in a market if the Sinclair-Tribune merger is approved. The commission should encourage diversity, localism, and competition in local television markets. Allowing one company – particularly one with Sinclair’s track record of abandoning local news in the St. Louis market – to own two of the top four stations accomplishes none of those goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" being more prominent and the last name "McCaskill" following in a similar style.

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator