

The United Church of Christ's media-justice advocacy arm and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) are celebrating a significant victory in one of its most important and longest standing legislative efforts in the area of media reform. On Wednesday evening, legislation that will expand low-power radio to 140 million people who are currently unable to receive it has been passed on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, poising the legislation for final approval in the Senate.

As part of its historic media advocacy ministry, the UCC has been working to ensure community groups around the country can have access to low-power radio stations for over 10 years, said Rev. J. Bennett Guess, the executive director of UCC's media-justice arm, the Office of Communication, Inc. (OC, Inc.)

Low power radio is an important opportunity to get a wide range of viewpoints and opinions on our airwaves, explained Helen Osman, Director of Communications for the USCCB. Churches and community organizations around the country have demonstrated the value of opening up opportunities for small neighborhood organizations to make their voices heard. We are delighted so many more will soon have a similar opportunity.

The Local Community Radio Act, H.R. 1147, is co-sponsored by Congressman Mike Doyle (D-Pa.) and Lee Terry (R-Neb.). The bill would alter a law passed in 2000 that unnecessarily limited low-power radio to rural parts of the country.

This step is an example of the great progress that can be made through coalition work. The assistance of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops staff as part of a joint effort has been a tremendous help in making sure this bill will become law, said Cheryl A. Leanza. We are particularly grateful for the leadership of Congressmen Doyle, Terry, Subcommittee Chairman Rick Boucher (D-Va.) and House Energy & Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Cal.) in getting us through the House.

Low-power radio stations are small FM radio stations that serve a geographic area with a radius

of 5 to 7 miles. They are non-commercial stations that can be obtained by community groups, churches, schools and other non-profits. Currently there are about 800 radio stations on the air.

On Monday, a wide range of faith communications leaders, including from the UCC, USCCB, National Association of Evangelicals, and the United Methodists, reiterated their support for the low-power radio legislation.

A companion bill, S. 592, sponsored by Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) was passed without objection by the Senate Commerce Committee on November 19, queuing up the bill for passage into law after its last hurdle the full U.S. Senate.

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