

WASHINGTON -- Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., is pushing legislation that would expand opportunities for low-power FM radio stations.

Such stations, which broadcast at 100 watts or less, have been touted as a way for minority communities, religious organizations and other groups to reach more people.

The Federal Communications Commission cleared the way for such stations in 2000, but Congress acted to limit their reach out of fear that they would interfere with the transmissions of existing radio stations.

Congress gave existing commercial stations a buffer of six places on the radio dial. If a station has a frequency of 101.1, for example, no low-power FM station is allowed to use 101.3, 101.5 and 101.7 above it, or 100.9, 100.7 or 100.5 below it.

Terry's bill would ease that restriction to two places on the dial above a frequency and two below. The change could make more frequencies available for the low-power FM stations.

Terry is pushing the legislation with Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Pa. The lawmakers unveiled the legislation Thursday.

"Low-power FM may be a weak signal only going out a couple of miles, but it has the potential of making our communities stronger," Terry said.

The low-power stations can provide forums for different groups in a community, he said.

Backers of the bill say a 2003 study funded by the FCC should help their cause. It found that if certain requirements were met, the changes in Terry's bill could be made without significant risk of interfering with existing FM signals.

The National Association of Broadcasters will oppose the legislation, said association spokesman Kristopher Jones. He said the association believes the

2003 study was flawed.

The group's broadcasters have no problem with creation of low-powered FM stations in areas where they can operate without interfering with an existing signal, Jones said.

"What our concern surrounds is situations, especially in metropolitan areas, where you would shoehorn additional radio stations onto an already crowded dial," he said.

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