



**CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**Testimony to the New York State Legislature Joint Advisory Board**  
**on the Broadcast of State Government Proceedings on New York's**  
**Governmental Affairs Channel**  
**December 10, 2009**

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Good morning Senator Serrano, Assembly Majority Leader Canestrari and other members of the Joint Advisory Board. My name is DeNora Getachew, and I am the director of public policy and legislative counsel for Citizens Union of the City of New York and I am joined by my colleague Rachael Fauss, policy and research associate for the organization. Citizens Union is an independent, nonpartisan, civic organization of New Yorkers who promote good government and advance political reform in our city and state. For more than a century, Citizens Union has served as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good. We thank you for holding this public meeting and giving us the opportunity to present Citizens Union's thoughts regarding the creation of a comprehensive New York State public access channel.

We applaud the Senate's and Assembly's efforts to create a new, improved New York State "C-SPAN" modeled on the successful federal program, C-SPAN. As Citizens Union and its good government colleagues have previously recommended, we believe this channel should not only include the actual coverage of legislative and executive actions, but should also provide coverage of conferences on state issues, committee hearings, issue roundtables, events sponsored by non-governmental organizations and other programs generally found on C-SPAN. We also would like to reiterate our colleagues' point that you use the "best practices" approach of C-SPAN and create a process that builds public support for this initiative to guide your development of an unbiased, unedited televised channel of state actions.

At this stage in the discussion, Citizens Union believes the goal is to ensure that this channel is operational as quickly as possible. Citizens Union is aware that one of the main outstanding issues with respect to the development of the channel is its governance structure. Based on Citizens Union's research, there are two mechanisms that other states use: (1) a completely independent board of directors – Vermont and Washington, among others uses this model; or (2) a board appointed by government officials – which is the model used by the Colorado Channel Authority. At this juncture, the organization does not have a specific preference regarding the structure, except to note that appointees should together have public interest backgrounds and experience in broadcast journalism and that the appointment structure should be transparent and ensure independence.

Based on our observation of other states' public access channels, most notably California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Washington D.C., and Wisconsin, Citizens Union also suggests consideration of the following best practices in developing the state government public affairs channel and corresponding website:

- Establish concrete goals to incrementally increase the channel's content as frequently as possible;
- Ensure that content archives are available on the public service provider's website, as well as on the respective government websites so that users can easily access this information;

- Ensure that archived documents remain accessible for a minimum of two years – to correspond with the length of the state legislative session;
- Ensure that public service provider’s site is prominently displayed and accessible from legislative and government sites, especially on the website’s homepage;
- Archive videos, agendas – including as appropriate lists of bills being considered – and transcripts and for each program together;
- Provide closed-captioning when streaming videos;
- Use online software that minimizes need for the user to download new software and place materials online in formats that are compatible with multiple platforms;
- Consider using high definition resolution options for online content for those who can accommodate buffering;
- Consider the Idaho model where there is a weekly wrap-up that summarizes the content aired in the prior week;
- Include pre-meeting commentary on archived material so that viewer knows what is being aired;
- Include television channel’s schedule on all relevant websites;

Citizens Union believes that this channel would be an important antidote to addressing voter cynicism and improving public confidence in state government through creating greater openness and transparency. Thank you for holding this important public meeting and for allowing Citizens Union the opportunity to present our views. We look forward to continuing to work with you as you implement this important reform.