



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Wants Hearing on TV Blackouts

PATTY RITCHIE January 18, 2012

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Frustrated Viewers Pay While Contract Fights Fester

State Senator Patty Ritchie is calling for a public hearing into the growing incidences of TV blackouts--like the ongoing disputes that have yanked New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres hockey games, and popular programs like "Bachelor" and "Grey's Anatomy" off some local airwaves--saying consumers are being denied services they are paying for.

Senator Ritchie has written to the Chair of the Senate's Energy and Telecommunications Committee, Niagara Falls-area Sen. George D. Maziarz, asking him to convene a hearing "to determine if our current laws, investigatory and oversight powers are sufficient to protect consumers affected by these decisions." She said she will consider legislative solutions to increase consumer protections.

Senator Ritchie is a member of the Energy Committee.

"I understand that each of these cases involves contract disputes among private companies, but it's undeniable that it's consumers who are ultimately paying the price, both in fees for services they can't access, and in the deep disappointment they experience by missing favorite events and programs," Senator Ritchie wrote.

In her letter, Senator Ritchie cites a number of recent cases of blackouts resulting from so-called "carriage disputes" between networks and at least one local TV station, and cable, satellite and other service providers, including:

- Last week's decision to yank a Syracuse broadcast station from Verizon's FiOS channel lineup;
- The dispute between Time Warner Cable and MSG network, which has left millions of viewers without access to Rangers, Sabres and Knicks basketball games since New Year's Day;
- A fight between Cablevision and Fox Sports that blacked out the opening of last year's baseball World Series, and

- Dish Network's 2010 decision to pull New York Mets games.

"In each case, viewers and customers were given little or no advance notice of the program changes," even as they continued to pay for services, Senator Ritchie said.

Senator Ritchie cited the contrast between these actions, and a decision by one satellite provider to continue airing Yankees baseball games even as it hammered out a new contract with the YES Network.

Senator Ritchie said that she would meet with colleagues this week to discuss the matter.

A copy of Senator Ritchie's letter is attached, and can also be viewed at:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/78319643/Ritchie-letter-on-Tv-blackouts>