



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

Federal, State, and Local Officials Gather to Urge Verizon to Reconsider Decision to Not Renew Contract with RNN

SHELLEY B. MAYER September 4, 2019

| ISSUE: **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, FREE PRESS, LOCAL NEWS**



“The promise of a robust democracy from civic engagement is at stake,” said Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins

“We are a story worth telling,” said Senator Mayer, highlighting the need for strong, local news coverage in Westchester and Long Island, covering nearly 4 million New Yorkers

Verizon’s decision to stop producing Fios1 News is “damaging American democracy” said County Executive Latimer

Westchester, NY -- On Wednesday, September 4th, federal, state, and local officials gathered at New Rochelle City Hall to press Verizon to reconsider its decision to end its partnership with Rye Brook's Regional News Network (RNN) and go back to the negotiating table. RNN has produced the local news program Fios1 News for Verizon for the past decade. In **letters** to regional representatives of Verizon, state, local and federal officials outlined the importance of robust local news programming options. More than 150 local jobs are on the line if Verizon terminates its contract with RNN. Early Wednesday morning, **Verizon announced** a partnership with Altice to provide access to News 12 for its customers, replacing RNN's Fios1 News, and leaving residents with only one local news source regionally.

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, "Local news is the driving force behind an informed public, robust civic engagement, and a healthy democracy. If we lose Fios 1, one of only two hyper-local cable news outlets in the area, millions of residents in Long Island and Westchester will be left with a single source of local coverage. There are also 150 hardworking employees with strong ties to the community whose lives are being impacted. We should be fighting for more local news, not less."

Westchester County Executive George Latimer said, "This decision hurts Westchester County residents on two fronts. First, the loss of roughly 150 jobs. In real world terms, that is 150 individuals and families who must search for new employment in order to continue to have a roof over their head or food on their table come November. Secondly, the loss of Fios1 News means Westchester residents will only have one source for hyper-local TV news. In a County of nearly one million diverse residents, many important stories may be left untold."

Congressmember Eliot Engel, NY-16, Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said, "Verizon's decision to end its relationship with Fios1 would close down another hyper-local

news outlet and have a damaging effect on the local economy through job losses. My colleagues and I have already written to Verizon urging them to reconsider this move and we remain hopeful that a new agreement can be reached.”

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer (D-Westchester) said, “Verizon should reconsider its decision to terminate its partnership with RNN and canceling one of the few local TV programming options residents have in Westchester and Long Island. We know that robust, community driven, local news coverage has a significant impact on knowledge of current events and civic engagement, and Verizon must acknowledge its civic responsibility. There are over 150 people doing this important work with RNN who have strong ties to the community and nuanced knowledge of local issues.”

State Senator Pete Harckham (D-Westchester/Putnam) said, “This is about corporate greed, nothing less. When telecommunications companies want exclusive access to our municipalities for their service, or they want to put up a cell tower in our neighborhoods, they have a legal responsibility to invest in our local news coverage. This decision, by Verizon, to close FIOS1 and contract News 12 for their hyper local news, will severely impact coverage in the Hudson Valley north of 287. I call on Verizon to rethink this ill conceived plan or the next time they want exclusive access to one of our communities or want to put up a cell tower, people will remember.”

State Senator David Carlucci (D-Westchester/Rockland) said, “Verizon placed corporate greed above workers, and it is wrong. News professionals who have dedicated their lives to informing the public are being treated as disposable. Local news is important to our communities and covers the issues that impact our residents. Verizon should have done the right thing and renewed their contract with RNN.”

State Senator Kevin Thomas (D-Nassau County) said, “Local journalism plays a key role in our daily lives and our public discourse. Losing a hyper-local voice like FiOS1 would be a serious loss to the Long Island region, both in terms of jobs and news coverage. I stand with my colleagues in encouraging Verizon to stay true to its commitment to the community and the public interest by maintaining high-quality local news services.”

State Senator Alessandra Biaggi (D-Bronx/Westchester) said, "The local news is at the core of maintaining community civic engagement in local government and ensuring residents are informed of issues that directly impact their lives. Ending Fios News 1 coverage of Rye Brook will eliminate a critical resource for information on local policy and affairs, as well as 150 jobs currently supporting the community. I firmly stand with my fellow elected officials and call on Regional President Anthony A. Lewis to renew Verizon's partnership with Rye Brook's RNN network, and continue to provide the high-quality local news coverage residents deserve,”

State Assemblymember Steve Otis (D-Westchester) said, “It is very important that Verizon changes course and renews their partnership with RNN. Westchester needs coverage from experienced and seasoned journalists who know our communities and provide knowledgeable reporting based on years of work. Quality local coverage is vital to the civic and governmental life of the people we represent. Retaining the RNN team for Fios News makes sense for everyone.”

State Assemblymember Tom Abinanti (D-Westchester) said, “We need to ensure that Verizon does not abdicate its responsibility as a state authorized cable network to keep our communities informed about local news. Each network should provide independent, original, in-depth news coverage. Knowledge is power and without local news coverage our residents are powerless to influence local government decisions.”

State Assemblymember David Buchwald (D-Westchester) said: "Verizon is making a mistake in eliminating the Fios1 News service without providing any assurance that this won't result in significant reductions in local news reporting. Westchester and the Lower Hudson Valley need multiple, independent and experienced voices in local journalism. Local news coverage helps connect us with local governments, school districts and community organizations and Fios1 News would surely be missed."

Westchester County Legislator Nancy Barr said, "Not only will valuable local jobs be lost if the RNN contract is not renewed, but our community will lose a media outlet which has provided local news for the past ten years. A free press is critical to our democracy, where the government is accountable to the people. Local press organizations like RNN keep our community informed about local government, local news, and community events which are not typically covered by the regional or national press. In the current political climate, where the free press is constantly under attack, it is more important than ever to have multiple news outlets reporting on the happenings in our community, providing news and perspective. RNN has been a valuable resource to our community and I sincerely hope Verizon will have a change of heart and renew their contract."

State Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley) said, "Local news is an integral part of our democratic process. I stand with my Senate colleagues in requesting that Verizon finds a solution to their RNN partnership so that our communities can continue to have access to the important voices and perspectives shared on FiOS 1 News. We must do everything we can to protect the virtue of and access to local journalism here in the Hudson Valley."

State Senator Jen Metzger (D-Hudson Valley) said, "As a representative of the Hudson Valley and a member of the Energy and Telecommunications Committee, I am deeply disappointed with Verizon's decision to terminate its contract with RNN Network and cease the production and broadcast of Fios News1. Access to quality local news provides a vital source

of information and encourages civic engagement. I join with my colleagues in urging Verizon to reconsider and continue to provide this essential coverage of local news for our residents."

State Senator James F. Gaughran (D-Suffolk County) said, "Local press is an essential component to our democracy, now more than ever. I'm deeply saddened by the news that Fios1 News will no longer be providing critical, hyper local news in the metro area and I implore both sides to find an amicable solution. The talented voices of the men and women of Fios1 will be missed across Long Island."

State Senator Anna M. Kaplan (D-Nassau County) said, "The dedicated and hard-working journalists at Fios1 are members of our local communities who know the issues that impact our residents, and their termination robs people in our communities of both choice and information. I urge Verizon to reconsider their decision to terminate RNN Network's Fios1 News, so that our residents can continue to access high quality local news coverage."

State Senator John Brooks (D-Nassau and Suffolk) said, "The advent of Cable TV opened up a new window for the distribution of timely news coverage, globally, nationally, and especially locally. Verizon's decision to terminate FIOS1 - which provides coverage of local issues for Long Island, Westchester, the Hudson Valley, and New Jersey - is a sad commentary on their commitment to serve their customers. The hyper-local news coverage that FIOS1 has always delivered a better understanding of the local issues that affect us all. The absence of FIOS1 and its commitment to local news will be a huge disservice to our community."