

Federal Communications Commission

§ 76.971

(i) The desired length of a contract term;

(ii) The anticipated commencement date for carriage; and

(iii) The nature of the programming,
(4) All requests for leased access must be made in writing and must specify the date on which the request was sent to the operator.

(5) Operators shall maintain, for Commission inspection, sufficient supporting documentation to justify the scheduled rates, including supporting contracts, calculations of the implicit fees, and justifications for all adjustments.

(6) Cable system operators shall disclose on their own websites, or through alternate means if they do not have their own websites, a contact name or title, telephone number, and email address for the person responsible for responding to requests for information about leased access channels.

(i) Cable operators are permitted to negotiate rates below the maximum rates permitted in paragraphs (c) through (g) of this section.

[78 FR 20256, Apr. 4, 2013, as amended at 84 FR 28768, June 20, 2019; 85 FR 51367, Aug. 20, 2020]

§ 76.971 Commercial leased access terms and conditions.

(a)(1) Cable operators shall place leased access programmers that request access to a tier actually used by most subscribers on any tier that has a subscriber penetration of more than 50 percent, unless there are technical or other compelling reasons for denying access to such tiers.

(2) Cable operators shall be permitted to make reasonable selections when placing leased access channels at specific channel locations. The Commission will evaluate disputes involving channel placement on a case-by-case basis and will consider any evidence that an operator has acted unreasonably in this regard.

(3) On systems with available leased access capacity sufficient to satisfy current leased access demand, cable operators shall be required to accommodate as expeditiously as possible all leased access requests for programming that is not obscene or indecent. On systems with insufficient available leased

access capacity to satisfy current leased access demand, cable operators shall be permitted to select from among leased access programmers using objective, content-neutral criteria.

(b) Cable operators may not apply programming production standards to leased access that are any higher than those applied to public, educational and governmental access channels.

(c) Cable operators are required to provide unaffiliated leased access users the minimal level of technical support necessary for users to present their material on the air, and may not unreasonably refuse to cooperate with a leased access user in order to prevent that user from obtaining channel capacity. Leased access users must reimburse operators for the reasonable cost of any technical support actually provided by the operator that is beyond that provided for non-leased access programmers on the system. A cable operator may charge leased access programmers for the use of technical equipment that is provided at no charge for public, educational and governmental access programming, provided that the operator's franchise agreement requires it to provide the equipment and does not preclude such use, and the equipment is not being used for any other non-leased access programming. Cable operators that are required to purchase technical equipment in order to accommodate a leased access programmer shall have the option of either requiring the leased access programmer to pay the full purchase price of the equipment, or purchasing the equipment and leasing it to the leased access programmer at a reasonable rate. Leased access programmers that are required to pay the full purchase price of additional equipment shall have all rights of ownership associated with the equipment under applicable state and local law.

(d) Cable operators may require reasonable security deposits or other assurances from users who are unable to prepay in full for access to leased commercial channels. Cable operators may impose reasonable insurance requirements on leased access programmers. Cable operators shall bear the burden of proof in establishing reasonableness.

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(e) Cable operators may not set terms and conditions for commercial leased access use based on content, *except*:

(1) To the limited extent necessary to establish a reasonable price for the commercial use of designated channel capacity by an unaffiliated person; or

(2) To comply with 47 U.S.C. 532 (h), (j) and § 76.701.

(f)(1) A cable operator shall provide billing and collection services for commercial leased access cable programmers, unless the operator demonstrates the existence of third party billing and collection services which in terms of cost and accessibility, offer leased access programmers an alternative substantially equivalent to that offered to comparable non-leased access programmers.

(2) If an operator can make the showing required in paragraph (f)(1) of this section, it must, to the extent technically feasible make available data necessary to enable a third party to bill and collect for the leased access user.

(g) Cable operators shall not unreasonably limit the length of leased access contracts. The termination provisions of leased access contracts shall be commercially reasonable and may not allow operators to terminate leased access contracts without a reasonable basis.

(h) Cable operators may not prohibit the resale of leased access capacity to persons unaffiliated with the operator, but may provide in their leased access contracts that any sublessees will be subject to the non-price terms and conditions that apply to the initial lessee, and that, if the capacity is resold, the rate for the capacity shall be the maximum permissible rate.

[58 FR 29753, May 21, 1993, as amended at 61 FR 16401, Apr. 15, 1996; 62 FR 11381, Mar. 12, 1997; 84 FR 28769, June 20, 2019]

§ 76.975 Commercial leased access dispute resolution.

(a) Any person aggrieved by the failure or refusal of a cable operator to make commercial channel capacity available in accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Communications Act may bring an action in the district court of the United States for the Judicial district in which the cable

system is located to compel that such capacity be made available.

(b)(1) Any person aggrieved by the failure or refusal of a cable operator to make commercial channel capacity available or to charge rates for such capacity in accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Communications Act, or our implementing regulations, §§ 76.970 and 76.971, may file a petition for relief with the Commission. Persons alleging that a cable operator's leased access rate is unreasonable must receive a determination of the cable operator's maximum permitted rate from an independent accountant prior to filing a petition for relief with the Commission.

(2) Parties to a dispute over leased access rates shall have five business days to agree on a mutually acceptable accountant from the date on which the programmer provides the cable operator with a written request for a review of its leased access rates. Parties that fail to agree on a mutually acceptable accountant within five business days of the programmer's request for a review shall each be required to select an independent accountant on the sixth business day. The two accountants selected shall have five business days to select a third independent accountant to perform the review. Operators of systems subject to small system relief shall have 14 business days to select an independent accountant when an agreement cannot be reached. For these purposes, systems subject to small system relief are systems that either:

(i) Qualify as small systems under § 76.901(c) and are owned by a small cable company as defined under § 76.901(e); or

(ii) Have been granted special relief.

(3) The final accountant's report must be completed within 60 days of the date on which the final accountant is selected to perform the review. The final accountant's report must, at a minimum, state the maximum permitted rate, and explain how it was determined without revealing proprietary information. The report must be signed, dated and certified by the accountant. The report shall be filed in the cable system's local public file.