



CITY OF MILWAUKEE

City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202 • www.city.milwaukee.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 29, 2013

Time Warner's digital conversion benefits Time Warner, not Milwaukee

Joint Statement from Common Council members Jim Bohl, Robert Bauman and Tony Zielinski

It has been brought to our attention that a number of channels in the local Time Warner Cable "basic" package will be shifted to the digital tier next month, meaning that most Milwaukeeans without a newer model television will need to obtain a digital to analog converter box in order to continue to view the entire basic cable package. We are both frustrated and perturbed by this news.

It seems to us this is yet another means for this provider to reduce service levels under existing packages, or to nickel and dime its customers into paying higher cable bills if they want to retain these 11 channels. The company is offering to provide a free digital to analog converter box to anyone who requests it by November 11. But by the end of 2014, those customers taking advantage of this purportedly "free" service have been told they will find an extra \$0.99 tacked onto their monthly bill as a result. How is this gimmick anything other than a bait and switch, and how long can customers expect that fee to remain at an even \$0.99 before it, too, jumps up in cost?

Let's not minimize who it is that will be most impacted by this move on Time Warner's part either—people with older model televisions who only subscribe to a basic cable package. In short, this cut in service will have a disproportionate effect on residents within the city of Milwaukee.

Of course subscribers to the basic cable package could just opt to stick with their old TVs and forego the digital to analog converter box altogether. But they will be missing out on Milwaukee's City Channel, the Weather Channel and a number of other options that *used to be included* as a part of their "basic cable," analog subscription. Simply put, they will be getting less service for the same amount of money. And by losing the City Channel from their basic, analog cable lineup, they'll be cut off from their local government as well when, frankly, we should be doing everything we can to provide more convenient access to the activities of government. After all, convenient access is the best means of creating transparency and accountability in government.

Local governments used to have a say in which cable companies did business with their residents. Just a few short years ago, municipalities had the authority to offer franchises to cable companies. Then, the state butted in with the so-called "Video Competition Act," took over the franchise process and absconded with the franchise fees that municipalities used to collect; yet the state has done very little to ensure that residents' complaints about cable companies have been adequately addressed. It's a safe bet that we wouldn't be seeing these sorts of shenanigans from Time Warner Cable if they were still accountable to the City of Milwaukee for their franchise.

Time Warner Cable says they are shifting more channels to digital in order to free up more bandwidth and offer more services to their customers. But in the end, it's Time Warner Cable that benefits the most, and Milwaukeeans who lose out.