

Washington at Center of DC Debate over Community Radio

Local News

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SPOKANE, Wash. - Small, community radio stations run by schools, churches, tribes and other groups could fade to s

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) is the primary sponsor of the Local Community Radio Act (S. 592), which would keep the

"The more we get local and diverse voices on the air, the better radio is going to be. More people will turn to the radio

Churches operate a lot of LPFM stations. Cheryl Leanza, policy advisor with the *United Church of Christ*, says 10 years ago, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) gave out just over 800 licenses. Since then, media lobbyists have done their best to stop the practice.

"And unfortunately, Congress responded to the pressure of large incumbent broadcasters and drastically cut back the program. Now, we're working to expand the program back to its original size."

Critics of the low-power FM stations have cited interference with other radio frequencies as a reason to stop issuing the licenses. But Flores says the FCC already has rules that prevent interference and has studied the issue, at the request of Congress.

"I think the study was done in 2003 - by independent contractors and engineers studying the interference question - and found there was nothing: No problems with low-powered FMs being on the dial close to big commercial stations."

The legislation has bipartisan support, including Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and John McCain (R-AZ) as co-sponsors. Media watchdog groups are pushing for its passage before Congress adjourns for Christmas. They say it has been on the Senate calendar since March and fear it will be shelved without some action.