



**Hearing on
“Examining the Sports Broadcasting Act”**

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial, and Administrative Law**

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Statement of Curtis LeGeyt

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I. Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Fitzgerald, Ranking Member Nadler and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Curtis LeGeyt, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). NAB is the voice of America's local radio and television stations and broadcast networks. Our members serve every community in this country with trusted journalism, emergency information, local sports, weather, public affairs programming and entertainment – all available to viewers free over the air.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today about the Sports Broadcasting Act, and television broadcasters across the nation applaud your attention to this issue. This hearing comes at a pivotal moment for American sports fans, local communities and the future of broadcasting. The Sports Broadcasting Act was enacted to promote broad public access to sports programming while allowing professional sports leagues to pool broadcast rights in ways that supported competitive balance and nationwide reach.

For decades, that bargain worked. Fans overwhelmingly could watch games for free on local broadcast television. Professional sports leagues benefited from the unmatched reach of broadcasting, and broadcasters benefited from live sports programming that helped sustain investment in local news, weather, emergency information and community service.

But increasingly, games are vanishing behind expensive streaming paywalls, forcing fans to navigate a costly and confusing maze of paid services to find the events they previously enjoyed for free on their local stations. This was not the broad access that Congress contemplated when they granted the major sports leagues the rare and valuable antitrust exemption contained in the SBA. In light of this anti-consumer drift away from the original intent of the law, this Committee should reaffirm that that the SBA applies to the leagues' negotiations with media companies that will distribute games through free, over-the-air broadcast television – not those that are going to lock away games behind a streaming paywall.

II. The Sports Broadcasting Act Was Built on a Public Access Bargain

The Sports Broadcasting Act was enacted in 1961 to address a specific legal problem in a specific historical moment. A federal court had limited the NFL's ability to pool and sell telecast rights. Congress responded by granting an antitrust exemption for joint league agreements to sell sponsored telecasting rights for professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey. Congress actively considered the scope of this exemption, ultimately excluding "closed circuit [and] subscription television."¹ As titled, the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961 applies only to broadcasting.

At the time, broadcast television was becoming the first true mass video medium. Television ownership had expanded rapidly after World War II. At the end of the war,

¹ *Telecasting of Professional Sports Contests: Hearing Before the Antitrust Committee of the House Comm. on the Judiciary on H.R. 8757, 87th Cong. 4 (Sept. 13, 1961).*

Americans owned roughly 7,000 television sets and began purchasing sets at a rate of about 200,000 per month.² By 1948, Americans owned more than one million TV sets.³ Television ownership grew from nine percent of Americans in the early 1950s to more than 80 percent by 1960.⁴

As it entered American homes, broadcast television helped professional sports become part of the country's shared civic life. Professional sports grew through the broad reach of free, over-the-air television.

No league has benefited more from broadcasting than the National Football League. The 1958 NFL Championship Game between the Baltimore Colts and New York Giants drew 45 million viewers, even with a blackout in the New York media market, and is widely credited with helping professional football explode in popularity.⁵ The NFL itself has acknowledged that televised games fueled the dramatic increase in the league's popularity and profitability and elevated the Super Bowl into a de facto national holiday.

This was not a one-way relationship. Live sports drew audiences to local broadcast stations, helped grow station revenues and supported investment in local news and other community-focused programming. Local stations do far more than carry games. They air highlights, pre-game and post-game shows, interviews, athlete profiles, youth sports features, charity events and community stories that deepen the bond between teams and the people they represent.

The premise of the Sports Broadcasting Act was not simply that leagues should be permitted to maximize the value of their rights. The premise was that a limited antitrust exemption would serve the public interest by helping sports reach the broadest possible audience.

That public access bargain deserves renewed scrutiny in today's marketplace.

III. Fans Are Paying More for Less Access

Media access matters even more at a time when professional sports leagues are maximizing revenue per fan attendance and prioritizing super-premium experiences, thereby pricing traditional fans out of attending games. For the past two decades, the U.S. professional sports ticket prices have surged more than 123%, far outpacing inflation.⁶ Even though roughly 9 out of every 10 professional sports stadiums have received public financing or taxpayer support for their construction or major modern renovations, game attendance costs are simply prohibitive for the average fan.

² Marc Horger, *The Big Game on the Small Screen: The Televised Transformation of Sport*, Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective (Nov. 2024).

³ *Id.*

⁴ David J. Halberstam, *Broadcasting's 100th: Celebrating sports on TV from its beginnings after the war through today!*, Sports Broadcast Journal (Dec. 20, 2021).

⁵ Horger, *supra* note 2.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Big games, big prices: Admissions for sporting events up 123 percent since 2000*, The Economics Daily (Feb. 5, 2026)

While some leagues point out that many games remain available on broadcast television, the broader trend is unmistakable: more marquee games are moving to exclusive streaming platforms; fans increasingly need multiple paid subscriptions to follow a full season; consumers face growing confusion about where games are available; and rural Americans, seniors and lower-income households are disproportionately disadvantaged by streaming exclusivity.

From a consumer perspective, needing multiple subscriptions and reliable broadband access to watch sports is not a more accessible system. And this is no longer a hypothetical problem. This season, Amazon Prime, Netflix and YouTube held exclusive national rights to 20 regular season NFL games, and YouTube TV is now the home of NFL Sunday Ticket. Beyond football, Amazon is an NBA national partner. Netflix has acquired rights to WWE's Raw, exclusive U.S. rights to the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2027 and 2031, and live Major League Baseball coverage, including opening night. Apple TV+ streams all U.S. Major League Soccer games, is the official Formula 1 partner in the United States and offers MLB's Friday Night Baseball.

A Nielsen Gracenote analysis found that sports programming offerings across the top five subscription video-on-demand services jumped 52 percent year over year.⁷

Fans are noticing – and they are frustrated.

A TiVo survey conducted in the fourth quarter of 2024 found that 58 percent of respondents reported being unable to watch specific sporting events because they lacked access through their subscribed services.⁸ A Hub Entertainment Research survey in the summer of 2025 found that 53 percent of sports fans said it had become more confusing over the prior year to find the sports they wanted to watch, and 65 percent said it was a hassle to use more than one service during a season.⁹ By early 2026, Hub found that 87 percent of sports fans were at least somewhat frustrated by the complexity of figuring out where to watch the sports they follow, and a quarter said they were very frustrated.¹⁰

This fragmentation is not just inconvenient. It is expensive.

Various estimates of the cost to stream every NFL game in the 2025 season approached or exceeded \$1,000.¹¹ The FCC's Public Notice noted that NFL games alone aired on ten different services in 2025, with some estimates suggesting a consumer could spend more than \$1,500 just to watch all NFL games.¹²

At the same time, subscription prices continue to rise. Netflix recently increased its ad-supported plan to \$8.99 per month, its standard plan to \$19.99 per month and its premium plan to \$26.99 per month. Apple TV+ increased its monthly subscription price by

⁷ George Winslow, *Study: Sports Programming on Major Streamers Up 52% YoY*, tvtechnology.com (Feb. 19, 2026).

⁸ TVT Staff, *TiVo: Viewers Continue to Cut Back on Streaming Subscriptions*, tvtechnology.com (Apr. 29, 2025).

⁹ George Winslow, *Sports Is Streaming's Content MVP, But Fan Frustration is Growing*, tvtechnology.com (Oct. 15, 2025).

¹⁰ George Winslow, *Study: Overloaded Sports Fans Fed Up with Fragmented Viewing Options*, tvtechnology.com (Mar. 9, 2026) (discussing survey conducted in December 2025-January 2026).

¹¹ See Jacob Feldman, *It Will Cost \$935 To Stream Every NFL Game This Season*, sportico.com (Sept. 5, 2025).

¹² FCC's Media Bureau Seeks Comment on Sports Broadcasting Practices and Marketplace Developments, Public Notice, MB Docket No. 26-45, at 4 (Feb. 25, 2026) (Public Notice or Notice)

30 percent in August 2025 to \$12.99, its third price increase in three years. Amazon began charging extra for an ad-free Prime Video tier in 2024 and is increasing that ad-free charge to \$4.99 per month.

Consumers strongly prefer a simpler model. A 2026 survey found that 90 percent of sports enthusiasts believe it is important for local sports to be on local broadcast television.¹³ For sports fans, linear television remains the preferred way to view sports, including football, basketball, baseball, hockey, golf, soccer, auto racing and tennis.

The conclusion is straightforward: fans are paying more, working harder and, in many cases, receiving less access than they had under the traditional broadcast model.

IV. Broadcast Television Remains the Most Consumer-Friendly Platform

Free, over-the-air television remains the only universally available video platform in America. Broadcast television reaches the broadest audience, provides free access without monthly fees, creates shared local and national experiences and brings in audiences and advertisers that support local news, weather and emergency operations.

Sports on broadcast television are not simply entertainment programming. They are part of the civic and cultural fabric of American life. Tomorrow, the men's World Cup will begin airing on Fox with a record 70 games on free broadcast television. But when the U.S. women's team takes the field in 2027 in Brazil, Americans will have to subscribe to Netflix to root on the red, white and blue.

The audience numbers highlight the unparalleled reach of broadcast television, as well as the vast numbers of consumers who are left behind when games are tucked behind streaming paywalls.

On Thanksgiving Day 2025, NFL games on CBS, Fox and NBC averaged 44.7 million viewers across three games.¹⁴ One of those games – Kansas City Chiefs versus Dallas Cowboys – averaged 57.2 million viewers, making it the most watched regular season game on record.¹⁵ By contrast, Amazon Prime's NFL game the next day, on Black Friday, averaged 16.3 million viewers,¹⁶ and its Christmas Day NFL game featuring the Kansas City Chiefs averaged 21 million viewers.¹⁷

The same pattern appears beyond the NFL. NBA games on ABC and NBC combined are outdrawing games on Amazon by 137 percent, 2.4 million viewers compared

¹³ *Survey: 90% say US local sports should be on local broadcast TV*, Advanced Television (Feb. 12, 2026) (reporting on TVB's 2026 Sports Survey).

¹⁴ See Nat'l Football League, News Release, 2025 Thanksgiving Day NFL Games Shatter Viewership Records (Dec. 3, 2025).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Eric Fisher, Amazon's Black Friday NFL Audience Jumps to 16.3M Viewers, Front Office Sports (Dec. 4, 2025).

¹⁷ See Lions-Vikings Christmas game on Netflix sets NFL streaming record, averaging 27.5M viewers, Associated Press (Dec. 31, 2025).

with 1 million. Even the Bassmaster Classic on Fox recently outdrew an NBA game on Amazon.¹⁸

Local sports tell the same story. NHL teams that moved from regional sports networks (RSNs) to broadcast television have seen ratings surge. The Vegas Golden Knights doubled their ratings after moving games to a Scripps broadcast station. Florida Panthers' ratings rose 130 percent after a similar move.¹⁹

Sports programming on one broadcaster's local stations has been estimated to reach audiences 250 to 300 percent larger than the regional sports networks they replaced,²⁰ with live game ratings often two to three times higher on broadcast television than on RSNs.²¹ The New Orleans Pelicans broadcast distribution through Gray Media reaches 4.1 million households across Louisiana, much of Mississippi and Mobile, Alabama, as compared with the 250,000 household footprint of its previous RSN.²² Gray has grown the audience three to five times higher compared with previous periods.²³

When sports are on broadcast television, more people watch.

That benefits fans, leagues, teams, advertisers and communities. Broadcast television reaches casual fans and devoted fans alike. It crosses income, geographic and demographic lines. It builds the next generation of fans. And it keeps America's biggest events accessible to the public.

V. Broadcast Sports Support Local News, Weather and Emergency Information

The benefits of broadcast sports extend beyond the games themselves.

Live sports remain essential to the economics of local broadcasting. During the NFL season in the fourth quarters of 2022 and 2023, live sports programming accounted for almost 40 percent of all U.S. national TV ad spend.²⁴ The 2024 Paris Olympics helped spike ad spending from approximately 19 percent in the third quarter of 2023 to 31.2 percent in the third quarter of 2024.²⁵ In 2024, live sports represented 80 of the 100 most-watched U.S. broadcasts.²⁶

Broadcast viewing also rises with football. Comparing the first and last weeks of August 2025, viewing increased by 36 percent on Fox affiliates and 29 percent on ABC

¹⁸ Michael Mulvihill (@mulvihill79), X (Mar. 18, 2026, at 11:12 AM ET), <https://x.com/mulvihill79/status/2034286728744497172>.

¹⁹ See Glen Dickson, Local Stations See Upside in Pro Sports, But It's Still Early Innings, TVNewsCheck (Apr. 14, 2025).

²⁰ Rick Young, *Local News & Sports Need To Be Everywhere, Just Like Viewers*, TVNewsCheck (Dec. 1, 2025).

²¹ Stephen Battaglio, *Why sports are returning to free over-the-air TV*, LA Times (Oct. 11, 2023).

²² Fred Dawson, Local TV's Role in Pro Sports Flashes Real Staying Power, TVTech (Apr. 1, 2025).

²³ Glen Dickson, Local Stations See Upside in Pro Sports, But It's Still Early Innings, TVNewsCheck (Apr. 14, 2025).

²⁴ Jennifer King, *Football spikes live sports TV ad spend annually in Q4*, EMarketer (Oct. 23, 2024).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Arif Islam, *NFL dominates most-watched US TV broadcasts of 2024 but share of top 100 hit by election coverage*, SportsPro (Jan. 6, 2025)

affiliates as football returned.²⁷ Seventy-two percent of surveyed fans said sports are more important to them than anything else they watch on television.²⁸

Those audiences and revenues help sustain local journalism. Local news is expensive to produce, and many stations face serious financial pressures. When sports move away from broadcast television, the harm extends beyond sports fans. It weakens the economic foundation that supports coverage of city hall, school boards, elections, severe weather, public safety and local community events.

Pureplay streaming services do not provide those public benefits. They do not maintain local newsrooms in communities across the country. They do not provide emergency weather coverage when tornadoes, hurricanes or wildfires threaten lives. They do not cover local elections, local charity events or the stories that make communities stronger.

Local broadcasters do.

VI. The Status Quo Does Not Work: Congress Should Put Fans at the Center of Any SBA Review

The Sports Broadcasting Act granted professional sports leagues extraordinary antitrust protection because Congress recognized the public value of broad sports distribution. No one in 1961 envisioned a marketplace where fans would need multiple streaming subscriptions simply to follow a single team.

Today, professional sports leagues are among the most powerful media rights sellers in the world, commanding enormous sums from broadcast networks, cable networks and global streaming platforms. According to published reports, the NFL is considering reopening negotiations with CBS to increase its annual fee from \$2.1 billion to \$3 billion.²⁹ The NBA recently increased the annual value of its media rights by 150 percent through agreements with Disney, NBCUniversal and Amazon.³⁰ S&P Global projects that U.S. television and streaming sports rights will reach \$37.1 billion by 2030, up from \$29.2 billion in 2025 and \$14.6 billion in 2015 – a 122 percent increase over the past decade.³¹ And with reports that the NFL could seek a 50 percent revenue increase in upcoming rights negotiations, those projections may prove conservative.³²

These increases should come as no surprise, as broadcasters are now competing for sports rights against Big Tech and global streaming platforms that operate under

²⁷ Eric Gruenwedel, *Nielsen: Football Drives August TV Gains for Disney, Fox*, Media Play News (Sept. 23, 2025).

²⁸ George Winslow, *Sports Is Streaming Content's MVP, But Fan Frustration is Growing*, tvtechnology.com (Oct. 15, 2025) (reporting on Hub Entertainment Research survey).

²⁹ John Ourand, *Is Goodell Overplaying His Hand?* The Puck (Mar. 23, 2026).

³⁰ John Ourand, *The NFL Media Rights Industrial Complex*, The Puck (Feb. 19, 2026).

³¹ S&P Global Market Intelligence Kagan estimates; industry data as of Mar. 2025. See also Wayne Friedman, *Sports Rights Costs Grow Faster Than Revenue Gains*, *Television News Daily* (Aug. 29, 2025) (reporting that sports rights fees increased 122% from 2015-2025).

³² Wayne Friedman, *Concerns Arise Over Local Ad Inventory With NFL, Other Sports League Deals*, mediapost.com (Mar. 10, 2026) (also noting concerns that the result of renegotiations would be to “peel off some existing games to be sold to existing or new streaming platforms”).

fundamentally different economic constraints. These companies can use sports not necessarily to make money on the games themselves, but to drive subscriptions, sell devices, gather data, promote online retail, support advertising ecosystems or reinforce unrelated business lines. Local broadcasters cannot subsidize sports rights with tens of billions of dollars in revenue from search, online retail, devices or global technology platforms. Their core business is serving local communities with news, weather, emergency information, sports and entertainment. On top of all this, Big Tech and streaming platforms are not subjected to the same regulatory restrictions that keep broadcasters from innovating and reaching full scale.

That imbalance matters for consumers. As more sports inventory migrates to exclusive subscription platforms, fans face higher costs, more confusion and less universal access. That result is difficult to reconcile with the public interest rationale that supported the SBA in the first place.

This Committee is right to ask whether the SBA's original consumer bargain still exists, and whether it preserves meaningful, simple and affordable access to sports for the American public. Broadcasters are not calling for the Sports Broadcasting Act to be eliminated. The Committee should, however, reaffirm that that the SBA applies to the leagues' negotiations with media companies that will distribute games through broadcast television, not media companies that are going to lock away games behind a streaming paywall.

Streaming can provide value to fans, and many broadcasters already distribute content across both traditional and digital platforms. But this innovation should not mean that fans must pay more, search harder and lose access to games that have long been available free over the air. Congress, not marketplace creep nor court interpretation, should decide if an antitrust exemption is to be expanded to cover negotiations with pureplay streaming services. Until then, deals that extend beyond the scope of the SBA deserve scrutiny and enforcement.

The public interest is best served by a sports media marketplace that keeps fans at the center and preserves robust free broadcast access alongside other distribution models.

VII. Conclusion

Live sports and free broadcast television have served the American public for generations. Together, they have built shared national moments, strengthened local communities, expanded fan bases and supported the local journalism and emergency information that Americans rely on every day.

That model is now at risk. More sports are moving behind paywalls. Fans are paying more and receiving less. Local stations are being asked to compete against global platforms that can subsidize sports rights with revenue from entirely different businesses. And communities risk losing both access to games and the local journalism that sports revenues help support.

This Committee's review of the Sports Broadcasting Act must ensure that fans remain at the center of the system and that the public interest benefits that justified the SBA are preserved for the next generation of American sports fans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.