

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR**

August 21, 2026

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, NE
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Early Renewal Applications of The Walt Disney Company's ABC Licenses
MB Docket No. 26-131

EX PARTE PRESENTATION – PERMIT BUT DISCLOSE PROCEEDING

Dear Secretary Dortch,

I am writing to submit this ex parte presentation in support of the renewal of the broadcast license for WTVD-TV, ABC 11. WTVD has served Raleigh, Durham, and Fayetteville, and communities throughout central and eastern North Carolina for over 70 years and is one of the trusted media institutions that North Carolinians turn to when they need reliable information about what is happening in their community. Its license should be renewed.

Protecting Local Media and the Freedom of the Press

There is a broader principle at stake in this proceeding that extends beyond one station, however: strong local media outlets are part of the fabric of our communities, and the First Amendment protects against government action that threatens or chills that essential public service. To be sure, the FCC has important regulatory responsibilities in licensing the public airwaves, but the agency should exercise that authority in a manner that protects the freedom of the press guaranteed by the First Amendment. Further, Section 326 of the Communications Act expressly provides that nothing in the Act gives the Commission the power of censorship and prohibits the Commission from imposing regulations or conditions that interfere with the right of free speech by means of radio communication. That statutory protection is particularly important when the government holds the power to determine whether a broadcaster can continue operating; even the perception that critical or unpopular reporting could invite regulatory consequences can have a chilling effect on what journalists are willing to report.

The Devastating Local Impact of Disruption

An unnecessary disruption in the license of WTVD, or any local news broadcaster in North Carolina, could have a devastating effect on the people and communities of this state. North Carolinians overwhelmingly trust local news organizations. Local news also helps create a shared culture among diverse residents in the community. Reporters are visibly present in the

community covering everything from sporting events to school news to emergency situations. In times of emergency, first responders rely on these outlets to disseminate critical information to the public, with context and instructions tailored for each community. North Carolinians trust the reporters to ask tough questions of elected officials, scrutinize candidates, and investigate problems. This public trust is an asset.

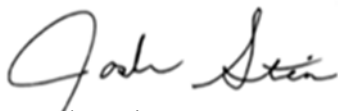
Protecting an Already Vulnerable Local News Ecosystem

The potential consequences of this proceeding are concerning given the well-documented erosion of local news outlets over the past several years. Newspapers and other local outlets have faced significant financial and staffing pressures, leaving fewer reporters to cover communities across our state, particularly in rural areas. Research has linked the decline of local news to lower civic and political engagement and heightened vulnerability to misinformation. This trend is dangerous for our democracy but also concerning during emergencies when it is in everyone's interest to ensure that accurate information is widely shared. Regulatory predictability is also essential to the public interest: local broadcasters need the confidence to make long-term investments in newsrooms, technology, and emergency infrastructure that communities depend upon.

Conclusion

The continuity of local news outlets should not be placed at risk by broader political and regulatory disputes in Washington that are separate from the local station's record of serving its community. Respectfully, I urge the FCC to evaluate WTVD's fitness for license based on its record of serving its communities—not on whether its journalism or that of its affiliated network is agreeable to those in positions of political power. Subjecting an established local station to an extraordinary renewal process risks signaling to broadcasters nationwide that regulatory certainty depends on corporate alignment rather than community service, creating an intended chill on independent local journalism. Because WTVD has earned the trust of the communities it serves and demonstrated a longstanding commitment to local journalism, the FCC should renew ABC11's broadcast license and allow it to continue serving North Carolina communities with the reporting and programming we have relied upon for over 70 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Josh Stein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Josh" and last name "Stein" clearly distinguishable.

Josh Stein
Governor