



Committee: GO
Committee Review: At a future date
Staff: Christine Wellons, Chief Legislative Attorney
Purpose: To introduce agenda item – no vote expected

AGENDA ITEM #10A
July 28, 2026
Introduction

SUBJECT

Bill 33-26, Cable Communications - Community Media Organizations – Requirements

Lead Sponsor: Councilmember Stewart

Co-Sponsor: Council Vice-President Balcombe and Councilmembers Katz and Evans

EXPECTED ATTENDEES

None

COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- N/A

DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

Bill 33-26 would:

- (1) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to adopt a racial equity and social justice statement;
- (2) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to include certain membership on the organization's board of directors;
- (3) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to follow certain standards of public ethics and public access; and
- (4) generally amend the law regarding cable communications and community cable organizations.

This report contains:

Staff Report	Page 1
Bill 33-26	© 1
Lead Sponsor's Memorandum	© 7

Alternative format requests for people with disabilities. If you need assistance accessing this report you may [submit alternative format requests](#) to the ADA Compliance Manager. The ADA Compliance Manager can also be reached at 240-777-6197 (TTY 240-777-6196) or at adacompliance@montgomerycountymd.gov

MEMORANDUM

July 23, 2026

TO: County Council

FROM: Christine Wellons, Chief Legislative Attorney

SUBJECT: Bill 33-26, Cable Communications - Community Media Organizations – Requirements

PURPOSE: Introduction – no Council votes required

Bill 33-26, Cable Communications - Community Media Organizations – Requirements, is scheduled for introduction on July 21, 2026. The Lead Sponsor is Councilmember Stewart. Co-Sponsors are Council Vice-President Balcombe and Councilmembers Katz and Evans. A public hearing is scheduled for June 15, 2026.

Bill 33-26 would:

- (1) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to adopt a racial equity and social justice statement;
- (2) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to include certain membership on the organization’s board of directors;
- (3) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to follow certain standards of public ethics and public access; and
- (4) generally amend the law regarding cable communications and community cable organizations.

BACKGROUND

As explained by the Lead Sponsor, “This legislation is intended to improve the governance structure of community media organizations in the county. The legislation aligns community media governance structures with comparable local community media organizations in the region and country...” *See* Lead Sponsor’s Memorandum at © 7.

BILL SPECIFICS

Bill 33-26 would require a community media organization hired by the County to adopt a racial equity and social justice statement; adhere to certain ethics rules; and include certain members within its board of directors.

The required racial equity and social justice statement would include:

- a statement of commitment to racial equity and social justice as part of the organization's core values;
- active recruitment of potential board members from diverse backgrounds and outreach to communities of color;
- a formal process to assess organizational culture and identify barriers to inclusion in board participation and leadership;
- communications and business practices that are tailored to the needs of communities of color and other marginalized communities;
- a process to identify and address discriminatory or non-inclusive behaviors;
- organizational policies and procedures that address diversity and inclusion; and
- a clear, realistic, actionable, and measurable commitment to addressing racial equity that is woven into the governance and culture of the community media organization.

Each member of the board of directors of the community organization would be required to file a financial disclosure statement with the Ethics Commission under Chapter 19A.

In terms of board membership, the board would be required to include up to 7 voting members who must be residents of the County, including:

- at least one member who is nominated by the County Council; and
- at least one member who is nominated by the County Executive;

This packet contains:

Bill 33-26

Lead Sponsor's Memorandum

Circle

1

7

Bill No. 33-26
Concerning: Cable Communications -
Community Media Organizations -
Requirements
Revised: July 13, 2026 Draft No. 1
Introduced: July 28, 2026
Expires: December 7, 2026
Enacted: _____
Executive: _____
Effective: _____
Sunset Date: _____
Ch. _____, Laws of Mont. Co. _____

COUNTY COUNCIL FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

Lead Sponsor: Councilmember Stewart
Co-Sponsors: Council Vice-President Balcombe and Councilmembers Katz and Evans

AN ACT to:

- (1) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to adopt a racial equity and social justice statement;
- (2) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to include certain membership on the organization's board of directors;
- (3) require a community media organization that contracts with the County to follow certain standards of public ethics and public access; and
- (4) generally amend the law regarding cable communications and community cable organizations.

By amending

Montgomery County Code
Chapter 8A, Cable Communications
Section 8A-32

Boldface	<i>Heading or defined term.</i>
<u>Underlining</u>	<i>Added to existing law by original bill.</i>
[Single boldface brackets]	<i>Deleted from existing law by original bill.</i>
<u>Double underlining</u>	<i>Added by amendment.</i>
[[Double boldface brackets]]	<i>Deleted from existing law or the bill by amendment.</i>
* * *	<i>Existing law unaffected by bill.</i>

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following Act:

Sec. 1. Section 8A-32 is amended as follows:

8A-32. Community media organizations.

(a) The County may contract with one or more community media organizations using funds from the Cable TV Special Revenue Fund or any other funds the County designates for community media in the approved County budget and under the County cable communications plan. Unless prohibited or otherwise limited under its contract with the County, the cable communications plan, or any executive regulation, a community media organization may also receive revenues from other sources.

(b) The purpose of a community media organization is to provide community media training, equipment, facilities, centers, and community media engagement platforms to enable residents, businesses, and community organizations to engage with, connect to, and inform other residents, businesses, community organizations, governments, and agencies by using community media. Supporting community engagement, communication, and education through community media and use of community media engagement platforms builds better understanding among a diverse population, increases opportunities for participation in and awareness of local culture and government, and promotes quality of life and economic development.

(c) The County may require a community media organization to perform one or more of the following functions as specified in the contract between the County and the community media organization:

- (1) manage the community media engagement platforms, including public access channels assigned to it by the County, community

- media websites and social media, and manage community media centers, facilities, and equipment;
- (2) establish policies and procedures for the use of any community media engagement platform and any community media center, facility, or equipment;
 - (3) train members of the community in the production of community media and use of any community media engagement platform;
 - (4) maintain any community media engagement platform and community media center, facility, or equipment for community use, including use by the general public, any community organization, and the business community;
 - (5) provide technical community media engagement platform and community media center, facility, and equipment assistance and support to the County, any participating municipality, and any educational institution;
 - (6) promote the use and benefits of community media and any community media engagement platform;
 - (7) produce and distribute local community media, including community news, programs and other media content; and
 - (8) undertake any other community media-related activity specified by the County as being in the public interest.
- (d) A community media organization must:
- (1) determine independently in the public interest and without government interference the content and scheduling of programming for any community media engagement platform;
 - (2) develop and implement policies to ensure fair, non-partisan, and unbiased coverage of issues on any community media engagement

platform and may not promote the candidacy of any candidate for public office by extending opportunities for use not extended to other candidates for the same office;

(3) develop and implement policies and programs that promote organizational sustainability and viability;

(4) promote and encourage creation of community media content representing a diversity of community interests and needs; [and]

(5) make a good faith effort to meet the affirmative action and minority, female, and disabled procurement goals that apply to County government; and

(6) adopt a racial equity and social justice policy that applies a racial equity and social justice lens into all aspects of the organization's operations. The policy must include:

(A) a statement of commitment to racial equity and social justice as part of the organization's core values;

(B) active recruitment of potential board members from diverse backgrounds and outreach to communities of color;

(C) a formal process to assess organizational culture and identify barriers to inclusion in board participation and leadership;

(D) communications and business practices that are tailored to the needs of communities of color and other marginalized communities;

(E) a process to identify and address discriminatory or non-inclusive behaviors;

(F) organizational policies and procedures that address diversity and inclusion; and

(G) a clear, realistic, actionable, and measurable commitment to addressing racial equity that is woven into the governance and culture of the community media organization.

[(e) Any officer, director, or executive director of a community media organization must annually disclose, confidentially and in writing, any communications-related activity or interest to the governing board of directors for the community media organization.]

[(f)] (e) A community media organization must provide a copy of its current articles of incorporation and bylaws to the County Executive and the County Council before the organization contracts with the County. Any proposed amendments must be submitted to the County Executive and County Council for review and comment at least 60 days before the organization takes final action on the amendment. The organization must submit a copy of all adopted amendments to the Executive and the Council within 5 working days of adoption. The organization's articles of incorporation and bylaws are subject to all County laws, including those enacted after the County contracts with the organization.

(f) To be eligible for a contract with the County under this Section, a community media organization must:

(1) include on its board of directors up to 7 voting members who must be residents of the County, including:

(A) at least one member who is nominated by the County Council; and

(B) at least one member who is nominated by the County Executive;

(2) require each board member to file a financial disclosure statement with the Ethics Commission under Chapter 19A, as amended;

- 108 (3) provide training to its board of directors regarding ethical and
 109 fiduciary responsibilities; and
- 110 (4) adhere to the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act, as
 111 amended, and the Maryland Public Information Act, as amended,
 112 as if the organization were a public body under those Acts.
- 113 (g) A community media organization must provide the County with:
- 114 (1) regular and complete financial reports as well as all other reports
 115 required under its contract with the County[.]; and
- 116 (2) [In addition, it must provide the County with] an annual
 117 independent audit, including a copy of any accompanying
 118 management letter.

Cable Communications - Community Media Organizations - Requirements

Councilmember Kate Stewart

Purpose:

This legislation is intended to improve the governance structure of community media organizations in the county. The legislation aligns community media governance structures with comparable local community media organizations in the region and country, as we as align with structure and requirements of similar organizations in the county.

The bill would:

- Require a community media organization that contracts with the County to adopt a racial equity and social justice statement;
- Require a community media organization that contracts with the County to include members nominated by the County Council and County Executive on the organization's board of directors; and
- Require a community media organization that contracts with the County to follow certain standards of public ethics and public access

Background:

A 2023 OLO [report](#) and multiple discussions at the GO Committee with media organizations supported by county Cable Fund dollars (including MCT/MCM, MCPS-TV, and MC-TV at the College) have indicated the urgent need to change the funding and oversight structure of these organizations as cable funds rapidly dwindle. The report also acknowledges there is overlap between the public media activities of these organizations.

Currently, each organization receives direct cable funds that are distributed to them by TEBS, and MCT/MCM also receives county contractual grant funding.

During last's year budget, the FY26 Budget Resolution under the section for "Cable Communication Plans" reads:

"Future Cable Plan strategy: The Executive must submit to the County Council's Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee a Strategic Plan that will frame the FY2027 budget allocations from the Cable Fund."

On February 19, 2026 the GO Committee reviewed a Strategic Plan provided by the TEBS regarding next steps for managing the funds and the County's cable stations. The plan outlines the direction the Executive branch will take regarding the Cable Fund and its distributions to

entities in FY27 and beyond. However, the Committee was left with many unanswered questions about how the changes would be implemented.

During this year's budget process, the full Council decided to maintain the current funding and governance pending more specific planning for community media governance post-transition.

As the Executive's office and the community media organizations work on a new governance structure, the current legislation is intended to update the structure and requirements for a community media organization in the county. This legislation requires one of the seven board members to be appointed by the Council and one by the Executive, requires the organization to have an RESJ statement and policy governing the board and services the organization provides for our diverse community, and requires the organization's board to meet as a public body and comply with public records, open meetings, and ethics laws.