Bill No. 33-26
Concerning: Cable Communications - Community Media Organizations - Requirements
Revised: October 20, 2026 Draft No. 4
Introduced: July 28, 2026
Enacted: October 20, 2026
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	*Heading or defined term.*
Underlining	*Added to existing law by original bill.*
[Single boldface brackets**]**	*Deleted from existing law by original bill.*
Double underlining	*Added by amendment.*
[[Double boldface brackets**]]**	*Deleted from existing law or the bill by amendment.*
* * *	*Existing law unaffected by bill.*

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**]]** a majority of voting members who **[[**must be**]]** are residents of the County, including:

(A) at least one member **[[**who is**]]** nominated by the County Council who:

(i) should have experience in the administration or financial management of a non-profit organization, a media organization, or a governmental entity; and

(ii) must not hold an elected position in government; and

(B) at least one member **[[**who is**]]** nominated by the County Executive who:

(i) should have experience in the administration or financial management of a non-profit organization, a media organization, or a governmental entity; and

(ii) must not hold an elected position in government;

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

(3) provide training to its board of directors regarding ethical and fiduciary responsibilities; **[[**and**]]**

(4) adhere to the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act, as amended, **[[**and the Maryland Public Information Act, as amended,**]]** as if the organization were a public body under **[[**those Acts**]]** the Act; **[[**and**]]**

(5) require the organization to publish a detailed annual report of its operations and accomplishments, including initiatives undertaken, outcomes, objectives, performance measures, and evaluation of effectiveness; and

(6) include within its bylaws provisions to:

(A) prescribe the business, legal, and fiduciary responsibilities of board members;

(B) prohibit board members from exercising editorial control over news reporting or news publishing decisions;

(C) ensure independent and unbiased news and political coverage, free from pre-publication review by charitable donors, government interference, or political influence; and

(D) establish a comprehensive editorial independence policy aligned with industry standards.

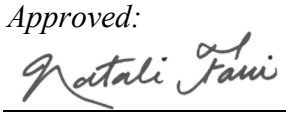
(g) A community media organization must provide the **[[**County**]]** Executive and the Council with:

(1) regular and complete financial reports, at least quarterly, as well as all other reports required under its contract with the County**[.]**; **[[**and**]]**

(2) **[**In addition, it must provide the County with**]** an annual independent audit, including a copy of any accompanying management letter; and

(3) a copy of the annual report required under paragraph (5) of subsection (f) of this Section.

Approved:



October 20, 2026

Natali Fani-González, President, County Council — Date

Approved:

Marc Elrich, County Executive — Date

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Sara R. Tenenbaum, Clerk of the Council — Date