

FCC Puts Broadcasters on Notice of Public Interest Expectations

May 29, 2026

On May 28, 2026, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a seven-page Public Notice to “remind broadcasters of their longstanding public interest obligations and further ensure that broadcasters are continuing to comply with the public interest obligations that underpin their licenses.”

The Public Notice begins with a discussion about the underlying rationales for the unique public interest obligations imposed on broadcasters – spectrum scarcity and a congressional determination that broadcasters will hold spectrum licenses in the “public trust.” It cautions that although the FCC has reduced many burdensome broadcast regulations, “the role of the Commission in determining whether broadcasters have met their public interest obligations has not faded.” And, emphasizing the Commission’s statutory duty to ensure that broadcasters are meeting their public interest obligations, the Public Notice goes on to warn that “[w]here the Commission finds that a broadcaster has failed to serve the public interest, the Commission may take appropriate action, including enforcement action, grant of a renewal application with conditions and/or on a short term basis, requiring a licensee to file an early license renewal application, or designating an application for hearing.”

Of note, the FCC issued this Public Notice on the same day that Disney-owned ABC filed early license renewal applications for its eight owned-and-operated stations pursuant to an April 28, 2026 FCC order. ABC included with each application a detailed public interest statement and an objection that describes the FCC’s early renewal mandate as an “effort to suppress free speech under the guise of bureaucratic process.”

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Practice Areas

Media
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The Public Notice comes on the heels of the Media Bureau's January 2026 Public Notice about the equal opportunities rule, which we wrote about here. It also comes just a year before the next broadcast renewal cycle begins (the first radio license renewal applications are due on June 1, 2027).

Wiley's Media Practice has extensive experience counseling broadcasters on FCC compliance and advocating for their interests before the Commission. If you have any questions, please contact one of the attorneys listed on this alert or the Wiley attorney who routinely handles your FCC matters.