

CHAPTER 477A

CABLE OR VIDEO SERVICE FRANCHISES

Purpose of chapter; 2007 Acts, ch 201, §1

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477A.1 Definitions.

As used in [this chapter](#), unless the context otherwise requires:

1. “*Board*” means the utilities board within the utilities division of the department of commerce.
2. “*Cable operator*” means the same as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 522.
3. “*Cable service*” means the same as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 522.
4. “*Cable system*” means the same as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 522.
5. “*Competitive cable service provider*” means a person who provides cable service over a cable system in an area other than the incumbent cable provider providing service in the same area.
6. “*Competitive video service provider*” means a person who provides video service other than a cable operator.
7. “*Franchise*” means an initial authorization, or renewal of an authorization, issued by the board or a municipality, regardless of whether the authorization is designated as a franchise, permit, license, resolution, contract, certificate, agreement, or otherwise, that authorizes the construction and operation of a cable system or video service provider’s network in a public right-of-way.
8. “*Franchise fee*” means the fee imposed under [section 477A.7](#).
9. *a.* “*Gross revenues*” means all consideration of any kind or nature, including but not limited to cash, credits, property, and in-kind contributions received from subscribers for the provision of cable service over a cable system by a competitive cable service provider or for the provision of video service by a competitive video service provider within a municipality’s jurisdiction. Gross revenues are limited to the following:
 - (1) Recurring charges for cable service or video service.
 - (2) Event-based charges for cable service or video service, including but not limited to pay-per-view and video-on-demand charges.
 - (3) Rental of set-top boxes and other cable service or video service equipment.
 - (4) Service charges related to the provision of cable service or video service, including but not limited to activation, installation, and repair charges.
 - (5) Administrative charges related to the provision of cable service or video service, including but not limited to service order and service termination charges.
 - (6) A pro rata portion of all revenue derived, less refunds, rebates, or discounts, by a cable service provider or a video service provider for advertising over the cable service or video service network to subscribers within the franchise area where the numerator is the number of subscribers within the franchise area, and the denominator is the total number of subscribers reached by such advertising. This subparagraph applies only to municipalities that include this provision in their franchise agreements as of January 1, 2007.
- b.* “*Gross revenues*” does not include any of the following:
 - (1) Revenues not actually received, even if billed, including bad debt.
 - (2) Revenues received by any affiliate or any other person in exchange for supplying goods or services used by the person providing cable service or video service.

(3) Refunds, rebates, or discounts made to third parties, including subscribers, leased access providers, advertisers, or any municipality or other unit of local government.

(4) Regardless of whether the services are bundled, packaged, or functionally integrated with cable service or video service, any revenues derived by the holder of a certificate of franchise authority from services not classified as cable service or video service, including, without limitation, revenue received from telecommunications services, revenue received from information services, revenue received in connection with home-shopping services, or any other revenues attributed by the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider to noncable service or nonvideo service in accordance with the holder's books and records kept in the regular course of business and any applicable rules, regulations, standards, or orders.

(5) Revenues paid by subscribers to home-shopping programmers directly from the sale of merchandise through any home-shopping channel offered as part of the cable services or video services.

(6) Revenues from the sale of cable services or video services for resale in which the purchaser is required to collect the franchise fee from the purchaser's customer.

(7) Revenues from any tax of general applicability imposed upon the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider or upon subscribers by a city, state, federal, or any other governmental entity and required to be collected by the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider and remitted to the taxing entity, including but not limited to sales or use tax, gross receipts tax, excise tax, utility users tax, public service tax, and communication taxes, and including the franchise fee imposed under [section 477A.7](#).

(8) Revenues forgone from the provision of cable services or video services to public institutions, public schools, or governmental entities at no charge.

(9) Revenues forgone from the competitive cable service provider's or competitive video service provider's provision of free or reduced-cost video service to any person, including, without limitation, any municipality and other public institutions or other institutions.

(10) Revenues from sales of capital assets or sales of surplus equipment.

(11) Revenues from reimbursements by programmers of marketing costs incurred by the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider for the introduction or promotion of new programming.

(12) Directory or internet advertising revenues including but not limited to yellow page, white page, banner advertisement, and electronic publishing.

(13) Copyright fees paid to the United States copyright office.

(14) Late payment charges.

(15) Maintenance charges.

10. "*Incumbent cable provider*" means the cable operator serving the largest number of cable subscribers in a particular franchise service area on January 1, 2007.

11. "*Institutional network*" means the system of dedicated fibers, coaxial cables, or wires constructed and maintained by an incumbent cable provider which is reserved and dedicated by the municipality for noncommercial purposes.

12. "*Municipality*" means a city.

13. "*Percentage of gross revenues*" means the percentage set by the municipality and identified in a written request made under [section 477A.7, subsection 1](#), which shall be not greater than five percent. However, if the incumbent cable provider is a municipal utility providing telecommunications services under [section 388.10](#), "*percentage of gross revenues*" means the percentage set by the municipality and identified in a written request made under [section 477A.7, subsection 1](#), which shall not be greater than an equitable apportionment of the services and fees that the municipal utility pays to the municipality, or five percent, whichever is less.

14. "*Public right-of-way*" means the area on, below, or above a public roadway, highway, street, bridge, cartway, bicycle lane, or public sidewalk in which the municipality has an interest, including other dedicated rights-of-way for travel purposes and utility easements. "*Public right-of-way*" does not include the airwaves above a public right-of-way with regard

to cellular or other nonwire telecommunications or broadcast services or utility poles owned by a municipality or a municipal utility.

15. “*Video programming*” means the same as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 522.

16. “*Video service*” means video programming services provided through wireline facilities located at least in part in the public right-of-way without regard to delivery technology, including internet protocol technology. “*Video service*” does not include any video programming provided by a provider of commercial mobile service as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 332, or cable service provided by an incumbent cable provider or a competitive cable service provider or any video programming provided solely as part of, and via, a service that enables users to access content, information, electronic mail, or other services offered over the public internet.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §2, 15; 2008 Acts, ch 1062, §1

477A.2 Certificate of franchise authority requirement.

1. After July 1, 2007, a person providing cable service or video service in this state shall not provide such service without a franchise. The franchise may be issued by either the board pursuant to [section 477A.3](#) or by a municipality pursuant to [section 364.2](#).

2. a. A person providing cable service or video service under a franchise agreement with a municipality prior to July 1, 2007, is not subject to [this section](#) with respect to such municipality until the franchise agreement expires or is converted pursuant to [subsection 6](#).

b. Upon expiration of a franchise, a person may choose to renegotiate a franchise agreement with a municipality or may choose to obtain a certificate of franchise authority under [this chapter](#). An application for a certificate of franchise authority pursuant to [this subsection](#) may be filed within sixty days prior to the expiration of a municipal franchise agreement. A certificate of franchise authority obtained pursuant to an application filed prior to the expiration of a municipal franchise agreement shall take effect upon the expiration date of the municipal franchise agreement.

c. A municipal utility that provides cable service or video service in this state is not subject to [this section](#) and shall not be required to obtain a certificate of franchise authority pursuant to [this chapter](#) in the municipality in which the provision of cable service or video service by that municipality was originally approved.

3. For purposes of [this section](#), a person providing cable service or video service is deemed to have executed a franchise agreement to provide cable service or video service with a specific municipality if an affiliate or predecessor of the person providing cable service or video service has or had executed an unexpired franchise agreement with that municipality as of May 29, 2007.

4. A competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider shall provide at least thirty days’ notice to each municipality with authority to grant a franchise in the service area, and to the incumbent cable provider, in which the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider is granted authority to provide service under a certificate of franchise authority that the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider will offer cable services or video services within the jurisdiction of the municipality, and shall not provide service without having provided such thirty days’ notice.

5. As used in [this section](#), “*affiliate*” includes but is not limited to a person that directly, or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with a person receiving, obtaining, or operating under a franchise agreement with a municipality to provide cable service or video service through merger, sale, assignment, restructuring, or any other type of transaction.

6. If a competitive cable service provider or a competitive video service provider applies for a certificate of franchise authority to operate within a municipality, the incumbent cable provider may, at its discretion, apply for a certificate of franchise authority for that same municipality. Such application shall be automatically granted on the same day as a competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider files a thirty days’ notice of offering service as required pursuant to [subsection 4](#). The franchise agreement with the municipality is terminated on the date the board issues the certificate of franchise authority to an incumbent cable provider. The terms and conditions of the certificate of

franchise authority shall be the same as the terms and conditions of a competitive cable service provider or a competitive video service provider pursuant to [this chapter](#) and shall replace the terms and conditions of the franchise agreement previously granted by the municipality.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §3, 15; 2008 Acts, ch 1062, §2

Referred to in [§477A.7](#), [714H.4](#)

477A.3 Application requirements — certificate of franchise authority.

1. The board shall issue a certificate of franchise authority under [this chapter](#) within fifteen business days after receipt of a completed application and affidavit submitted by the applicant and signed by an officer or general partner of the applicant. The application and affidavit shall provide all of the following information:

a. That the applicant has filed or will timely file with the federal communications commission all forms required by the commission in advance of offering cable service or video service in this state.

b. That the applicant agrees to comply with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and rules.

c. That the applicant agrees to comply with all applicable state laws and nondiscriminatory municipal ordinances and regulations regarding the use and occupation of a public right-of-way in the delivery of the cable service or video service, to the extent consistent with [this chapter](#), including the police powers of the municipalities in which the service is delivered.

d. A description of the service area to be served and the municipalities to be served by the applicant which may include certain designations of unincorporated areas. This description shall be updated by the applicant prior to the expansion of cable service or video service to a previously undesignated service area and, upon such expansion, notice shall be given to the board of the service area to be served by the applicant.

e. The address of the applicant's principal place of business and the names of the applicant's principal executive officers.

2. The failure of the board to notify the applicant of the completeness of the applicant's affidavit or issue a certificate of franchise authority before the fifteenth business day after receipt of a completed affidavit shall constitute issuance of the certificate of franchise authority applied for by the applicant without further action by the applicant.

3. The certificate of franchise authority issued by the board shall contain all of the following:

a. A grant of authority to provide cable service or video service in the service area designated in the application.

b. A grant of authority to use and occupy the public right-of-way in the delivery of cable service or video service, subject to the laws of this state, including the police powers of the municipalities in which the service is delivered.

c. A statement that the grant of authority provided by the certificate is subject to the lawful operation of the cable service or video service by the applicant or the applicant's successor.

d. A statement that the franchise is for a term of ten years, is renewable under the terms of [this section](#), and is nonexclusive.

4. A certificate of franchise authority issued by the board is fully transferable to any successor of the applicant to which the certificate was initially issued. A notice of transfer shall be filed by the holder of the certificate of franchise authority with the board and the affected municipality and shall be effective fourteen business days after submission. The notice of transfer shall include the address of the successor's principal place of business and the names of the successor's principal executive officers. The successor shall assume all regulatory rights and responsibilities of the holder of the certificate. Neither the board nor an affected municipality shall have authority to review or require approval of such transfer.

5. The certificate of franchise authority issued by the board may be terminated by a person providing cable service or video service by submitting written notice to the board and any affected municipality. Neither the board nor an affected municipality shall have authority to review or require approval of such termination.

6. The board shall only have the authorization to issue a certificate of franchise authority as provided in [this section](#), and shall not impose any additional requirements or regulations upon an applicant.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §4, 15

Referred to in [§477A.2](#)

477A.4 Applicability to federal law.

To the extent required by applicable law, a certificate of franchise authority issued under [this chapter](#) shall constitute a “franchise” for the purposes of 47 U.S.C. § 541(b)(1). To the extent required for the purposes of 47 U.S.C. § 521 – 561, only the state of Iowa shall constitute the exclusive franchising authority for competitive cable service providers and competitive video service providers in this state.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §5, 15

477A.5 Municipality restrictions.

1. A municipality shall not require a holder of a certificate of franchise authority to do any of the following:

- a. Comply with a mandatory build-out provision.
- b. Obtain a separate franchise.
- c. Pay any additional fees, except as provided in [this chapter](#).
- d. Be subject to any additional franchise requirement by the municipality, except as provided in [this chapter](#).

2. For purposes of [this section](#), a “franchise requirement” includes any provision regulating rates or requiring build-out requirements to deploy any facilities or equipment.

3. [Section 364.2](#) shall not apply to a holder of a certificate of franchise authority issued pursuant to [this chapter](#).

2007 Acts, ch 201, §6, 15

477A.6 Public, educational, and governmental access channels.

1. Not later than one hundred eighty days after a request by a municipality in which a competitive cable service provider or a competitive video service provider is providing cable service or video service, the holder of the certificate of authority for that municipality shall designate a sufficient amount of capacity on the certificate holder’s communications network to allow the provision of a comparable number of public, educational, and governmental channels that the incumbent cable provider in the municipality has activated and provided in the municipality under the terms of a franchise agreement with a municipality prior to July 1, 2007. If no such channels are active, the municipality may request a maximum of three public, educational, and governmental channels for a municipality with a population of at least fifty thousand, and a maximum of two public, educational, and governmental channels for a municipality with a population of less than fifty thousand.

a. The public, educational, and governmental content to be provided pursuant to [this section](#) and the operation of the public, educational, and governmental channels shall be the responsibility of the municipality receiving the benefit of such capacity. The holder of a certificate of franchise authority shall be responsible only for the transmission of such content, subject to technological restraints.

b. The municipality receiving capacity under [this section](#) shall ensure that all transmissions, content, or programming to be transmitted by the holder of the certificate of franchise authority are provided or submitted to the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider in a manner or form that is capable of being accepted and transmitted by the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider, without requirement for additional alteration or change in the content, over the particular network of the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider, which is compatible with the technology or protocol utilized by the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider to deliver services. At its election the municipality may reasonably request any cable service provider or video service provider to make any necessary change to the form of any programming, furnished for transmission,

which shall be charged to the municipality, not to exceed the provider's incremental costs. The municipality shall have up to twelve months to reimburse the cable service provider or video service provider. The provision of such transmissions, content, or programming to the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider shall constitute authorization for such holder to carry such transmissions, content, or programming, at the holder's option, beyond the jurisdictional boundaries stipulated in any franchise agreement.

2. Where technically feasible, a competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider that is a holder of a certificate of franchise authority and an incumbent cable provider shall use reasonable efforts to interconnect the cable or video communications network systems of the certificate holder and incumbent cable provider for the purpose of providing public, educational, and governmental programming. Interconnection may be accomplished by direct cable, microwave link, satellite, or other reasonable method of connection. A holder of a certificate of franchise authority and an incumbent cable provider shall negotiate in good faith and an incumbent cable provider shall not withhold interconnection of public, educational, or governmental channels.

3. A court of competent jurisdiction shall have exclusive jurisdiction to enforce any requirement under [this section](#).

2007 Acts, ch 201, §7, 15

477A.7 Fees — financial support.

1. a. In any service area in which a competitive cable service provider or a competitive video service provider holding a certificate of franchise authority offers or provides cable service or video service, the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider shall calculate and pay a franchise fee to the municipality with authority to grant a certificate of franchise authority in that service area upon the municipality's written request. If the municipality makes such a request, the franchise fee shall be due and paid to the municipality on a quarterly basis, not later than forty-five days after the close of the quarter, and shall be calculated as a percentage of gross revenues. The municipality shall not demand any additional franchise fees from the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider, and shall not demand the use of any other calculation method for the franchise fee.

b. All cable service providers and video service providers shall pay a franchise fee at the same percent of gross revenues as had been assessed on the incumbent cable provider by the municipality as of January 1, 2007, and such percentage shall continue to apply for the period of the remaining term of the existing franchise agreement with the municipality. Upon expiration of the period of the remaining term of the agreement with the incumbent cable service provider, a municipality may request an increase in the franchise fee up to five percent of gross revenues.

c. A provider who is both a competitive cable service provider and a competitive video service provider shall be subject to and only be required to pay one franchise fee to a municipality under [this subsection](#) regardless of whether the provider provides both cable service and video service.

d. At the request of a municipality and not more than once per year, an independent auditor may perform reasonable audits of the competitive cable service provider's or competitive video service provider's calculation of the franchise fee under [this subsection](#). The municipality shall bear the costs of any audit requested pursuant to [this subsection](#), unless the audit discloses that the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider has underpaid franchise fees by more than five percent, in which case the competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider shall pay all of the reasonable and actual costs of the audit.

e. A competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider may identify and collect the amount of the franchise fee as a separate line item on the regular bill of each subscriber.

2. If an incumbent cable provider pays any fee to a municipality for public, educational, and governmental access channels, any subsequent holder of a certificate of franchise authority that includes that municipality shall pay this fee at the same rate during the

remaining term of the existing franchise agreement with the municipality, even if the incumbent cable provider elects to convert to a certificate of franchise authority pursuant to [section 477A.2](#). All fees collected pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be used only for the support of the public, educational, and governmental access channels.

3. a. If an incumbent cable provider is required by a franchise agreement as of January 1, 2007, to provide institutional network capacity to a municipality for use by the municipality for noncommercial purposes, the incumbent cable provider and any subsequent holder of a certificate of franchise authority shall provide support only for the existing institutional network on a pro rata basis per customer. Any financial support provided for an institutional network shall be limited to ongoing maintenance and support of the existing institutional network. [This subsection](#) shall be applicable only to a cable service provider's or video service provider's first certificate of franchise authority issued under [this chapter](#), and shall not apply to any subsequent renewals. For the purposes of [this subsection](#), maintenance and support shall only include the reasonable incremental cost of moves, changes, and restoring connectivity of the fiber or coaxial cable lines up to a demarcation point at the building.

b. For purposes of [this subsection](#), the number of customers of a cable service provider or video service provider shall be determined based on the relative number of subscribers in that municipality at the end of the prior calendar year as reported to the municipality by all incumbent cable providers and holders of a certificate of franchise authority. Any records showing the number of subscribers shall be considered confidential records pursuant to [section 22.7](#). The incumbent cable provider shall provide to the municipality, on an annual basis, the maintenance and support costs of the institutional network, subject to an independent audit. A municipality acting under [this subsection](#) shall notify and present a bill to competitive cable service providers or competitive video service providers for the amount of such support on an annual basis, beginning one year after issuance of the certificate of franchise authority. The annual institutional network support shall be due and paid by the providers to the municipality in four quarterly payments, not later than forty-five days after the close of each quarter. The municipality shall reimburse the incumbent cable provider for the amounts received from competitive cable service providers or competitive video service providers.

c. [This subsection](#) shall not apply if the incumbent cable service provider is a municipal utility providing telecommunications services under [section 388.10](#).

4. A franchise fee may be assessed or imposed by a municipality without regard to the municipality's cost of inspecting, supervising, or otherwise regulating the franchise, and the fees collected may be credited to the municipality's general fund and used for municipal general fund purposes.

5. To the extent that any amount of franchise fees assessed by and paid to a municipality prior to May 29, 2007, pursuant to a franchise agreement between a municipality and any person to erect, maintain, and operate plants and systems for cable television, exceeds the municipality's reasonable costs of inspecting, supervising, or otherwise regulating the franchise, such amount is deemed and declared to be authorized and legally assessed by and paid to the municipality.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §8, 15

Referred to in [§477A.1](#)

477A.8 Customer service standards.

1. The holder of a certificate of franchise authority shall comply with customer service requirements consistent with those contained in 47 C.F.R. § 76.309, and shall maintain a local or toll-free telephone number for customer service contact.

2. The holder of a certificate of franchise authority shall implement an informal process for handling inquiries from municipalities and customers concerning billing events, service issues, and other complaints. If an issue is not resolved through this informal process, a municipality may request a confidential nonbinding mediation with the holder of a certificate of franchise authority, with the costs of such mediation to be shared equally between the municipality and the holder of a certificate of franchise authority.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §9, 15

477A.9 Nondiscrimination by municipality.

1. A municipality shall allow the holder of a certificate of franchise authority to install, construct, and maintain a communications network within a public right-of-way and shall provide the holder of a certificate of franchise authority with open, comparable, nondiscriminatory, and competitively neutral access to the public right-of-way.

2. A municipality shall not discriminate against the holder of a certificate of franchise authority in providing access to a municipal building or through a municipal utility pole attachment term.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §10, 15

477A.10 Provider discrimination prohibited.

1. The purpose of [this section](#) is to prevent discrimination among potential residential subscribers.

2. A competitive cable service provider or competitive video service provider holding a certificate of franchise authority shall not deny access to any group of potential residential subscribers because of the income of residents in the local area in which such group resides.

3. *a.* A video service provider operating under a certificate of franchise authority that is using telecommunication facilities to provide video services and has more than five hundred thousand telecommunication access lines in this state shall extend its system to a potential subscriber, at no cost to the potential subscriber, if all of the following criteria are met:

(1) The potential subscriber is located within its authorized service area.

(2) At least two hundred fifty dwelling units are located within two thousand five hundred feet of a remote terminal.

(3) These dwelling units do not have cable or video service available from another cable service provider or video service provider.

b. [This subsection](#) shall be applicable only after the first date on which the video service provider operating under a certificate of franchise authority is providing cable service or video service to more than fifty percent of all cable and video subscribers receiving cable or video service from the holders of certificates of franchise authority and any other providers of cable or video services operating under franchise agreements with a municipality.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §11, 15

477A.11 Applicability of other law.

1. [This chapter](#) is intended to be consistent with the federal Cable Act, 47 U.S.C. § 521 et seq.

2. Except as otherwise stated in [this chapter](#), [this chapter](#) shall not be interpreted to prevent a competitive cable service provider, competitive video service provider, municipality, or other provider of cable service or video service from seeking clarification of any rights and obligations under federal law or to exercise any right or authority under federal or state law.

2007 Acts, ch 201, §12, 15

477A.12 Rules.

The board shall adopt rules necessary to administer [this chapter](#).

2007 Acts, ch 201, §13, 15