The issue:
Congress must work closely with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to ensure that their constituents do not lose access to their local TV stations during the ongoing broadcast repack process. The FCC must apply a fair and equitable waiver process to ensure that no TV station is forced off the air if it is unable to meet a repack deadline due to circumstances outside its control.

Background:
By law, nearly 1,000 local television stations across the country are required to move to new frequencies due to the FCC’s broadcast spectrum incentive auction. These are stations that did not participate in the auction and received no benefit, but are nonetheless undertaking intensive and time consuming work to accommodate it.

These frequency moves are scheduled to occur over ten phases, with an expected completion date of July 3, 2020. This timeline was established before the scope of the transition was apparent and progress to date indicates that it will be problematic due to issues outside of broadcasters’ control. Current law would require stations that are unable to meet their deadlines to go off the air absent a waiver from the FCC.

Delays due to weather, a shortage of qualified tower crews and other complications may prevent some stations from meeting their deadlines despite their best efforts. Already, at the recent conclusion of the first phase in the ten phase repack, the FCC had to grant extensions to more than 10 percent of impacted stations due to circumstances outside the stations’ control. Tower companies expect that repacking challenges and delays will only increase in subsequent phases, threatening the ability of repacked stations to continue to serve their viewers.

Seventy-two million Americans who watch TV over the air for free with an antenna are at risk of losing their lifeline connection when stations move frequencies if they do not rescan their TV sets. Even then, some viewers will find themselves unable to receive the new signal.

The bottom line:
Your constituents should not lose access to the critical emergency information and local news broadcast stations provide due to arbitrary and unachievable deadlines set by the FCC. We urge you to stay in close contact with the FCC on these matters throughout the 116th Congress to make sure the FCC applies a waiver standard that ensures no TV station is forced off the air due to circumstances beyond its control.

For more information and to see how your state and district will be impacted, visit nab.org/TVStationMoves.