

Complaints about Broadcast Journalism

The FCC receives a wide variety of comments and complaints from consumers about whether networks, stations, news reporters and/or commentators give inaccurate or one-sided news presentations, fail to cover certain events or to cover them inadequately, or overemphasize or dramatize certain aspects of events. Other complaints concern reporting illnesses, accidents or deaths of individuals before the families have been informed, or the conduct of journalists in the gathering and reporting of news.

The FCC's authority to respond to these complaints is narrow in scope, and the agency is prohibited by law from engaging in censorship or infringing on First Amendment rights of the press.

What can the FCC do?

The FCC cannot interfere with a broadcaster's selection and presentation of material for the news and/or its commentary. However, the FCC does regulate content in some narrow areas. Federal law prohibits or limits the broadcast of obscene, indecent or profane language as defined by U.S. courts. Also, the FCC may issue penalties for knowingly broadcasting false information.

What responsibilities do broadcasters have?

As public trustees, broadcasters may not intentionally distort the news. The FCC has stated publicly that "rigging or slanting the news is a most heinous act against the public interest." The FCC may act to protect the public interest when it has received documented evidence, such as testimony from persons who have direct personal knowledge of an intentional falsification of the news. Without such documented evidence, the FCC generally cannot intervene.

What if I have comments or concerns about a specific news broadcast or commentary?

All concerns or comments about a specific news broadcast or commentary should be directed to the local station and network involved, so that the people responsible for making the programming decisions can become better informed about audience opinion.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division

445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number at the bottom of the page, or send an email to fcc504@fcc.gov.

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