

# Public access TV backers decry channels' move

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Oahu's community access nonprofit is protesting a plan by Spectrum Cable to move its channels to a remote location in the cable lineup, saying the move will hurt producers of local programming and result in a substantial loss of viewership.

"We're being exiled to digital Siberia, where no one wants to go," said Sanford Inouye, president and CEO of Olelo Community Media.

Olelo's public access channels, now located between channels 49 and 54, are being moved to channels between 182 and 187 — a move that critics are calling "channel slamming."

But Spectrum, which is upgrading its system to all-digital starting Tuesday, insists it'll be easier for viewers to find channels using a digital guide and search function.

The changes are part of a system upgrade that Spectrum says will offer better picture quality, 70 more high-definition channels, faster internet speeds, addi-

tional content and new features.

Much of the upgrade, including the digital transformation, was mandated when the state Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs approved the transfer of Oceanic Time Warner Cable LLC's six cable franchises to Charter Communications, parent company of Spectrum, two years ago.

"Some channels will be added, other current channels will be moving to new locations," Spectrum spokesman Dennis Johnson said Wednesday.

IN RESPONSE to complaints about the channel shakeup, the DCCA Cable Advisory Committee will hold a meeting Friday to let critics air their complaints and allow Spectrum to explain itself. The meeting will be at 5 p.m. in the first-floor DCCA Queen Lili'uokalani Conference Room, 335 Merchant St.

DCCA spokesman William Nhieue said the committee is an advisory body, and it's unlikely any decision-making or definitive actions will

## Spectrum TV network going all-digital

Spectrum TV customers will transition to an all-digital network beginning Tuesday, requiring a digital cable box for each television.

The company said it will give customers up to two free digital boxes for two or five years depending on their programming package. Additional boxes will cost \$6.99 per month. Spectrum is notifying customers of their specific upgrade date.

Spectrum said moving to all-digital frees up network capacity for faster internet speeds and more high-definition and on-demand content.

The boxes can be shipped free directly to customers by signing up at spectrum.com/digitalnow or calling 844-278-3408. Customers also can obtain boxes at a Spectrum store.

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be taken by either the committee or DCCA at this time.

In a Jan. 29 letter to the DCCA addressing the situation, Laurence "Buz" Schott, senior director of government affairs with Charter Communications, said the channel changes will enhance the subscriber viewing experience and allow the company to remain competitive in a market that now includes competitive cable operators, satellite provid-

ers and over-the-top video providers.

But Olelo's Inouye said the move represents a disservice to its subscribers and is "patently unfair and totally unnecessary."

"There is no technical reason to move us," he said.

Public access channels in Hawaii have maintained the same channel numbers for at least a couple of decades. But now, Inouye said, the public access entities face

losing a huge chunk of their audience.

Public access programs, he said, typically build their audience from those who channel-surf up and down the lineup. But it's unlikely channel-surfing will reach such heights.

"We will lose viewers and, in some cases, they won't come back," Inouye said.

THE STATE'S public access entities are underwritten through a portion of the franchise fees collected from cable subscribers. Local program producers, however, will be forced to rebrand their identity.

Rebranding and communicating the channel lineup change by Tuesday is unrealistic and impractical in such a short period of time, Inouye said.

"If they have to rebrand the channels, it's really like starting all over again. It could be devastating," he said.

Leon Siu, producer of the cable program known as "Voices of Truth — One on One with Hawaii's Future," said Spectrum's move will

end up cutting off his show from its audience.

"I see this as a free-speech issue," he said. "Public access was established to provide the people with a voice. Now they're doing us a great disservice."

Inouye said Spectrum has a track record of "channel slamming" access channels in Missouri, Wisconsin, Massachusetts and Minnesota.

Spectrum is expected to relocate public access channels on the neighbor islands following the Oahu migration, and the mayors of all four Hawaii counties have written letters objecting to the move.

Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa even suggested that Charter's pending Kahului and Lahaina franchise renewals be held in abeyance "until this matter is resolved to the complete satisfaction of Maui County and Akaku Maui County Community Television."

Meanwhile, Hawaiian Telecom, Oahu's other cable provider, says it is keeping the public access channels where they are.