The 114th Congress begins its first session

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This month, new policymakers were sworn into office and began the work of representing their constituents on Capitol Hill. The Performing Arts Alliance (PAA) looks forward to building relationships with new members of the 114th Congress and educating them about the role and value of the nonprofit performing arts in America.

House and Senate committee and subcommittee assignments will be finalized soon; PAA will provide you with a list of assignments so that you can find out where your representatives are serving. In the meantime, we encourage you to introduce your organization and its work to your legislators. Start building relationships by writing a letter, making a phone call, or scheduling a meeting--especially if your Representative or Senator is new to office. Use the PAA advocacy toolkit for tips on connecting with your leaders.

New net neutrality rules expected Feb. 26
At the Consumer Electronics Showcase on January 7, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler announced that the agency will vote on a new net neutrality proposal at its open meeting on February 26. Net neutrality—the principle that all users and content providers should have equal access to the internet and that the internet should be a level playing field—has been in debate for years, most recently since January 2014 after a DC district court struck down parts of the agency’s 2010 net neutrality rules.

The FCC received almost four million public comments last summer and fall from advocates weighing in on the direction of the new rules. The debate centers around the agency reclassifying broadband as a telecommunications service under Title II of the Communications Act. With this reclassification, the FCC could regulate broadband just as it does telephone services.

Several sources report that the proposal may reclassify broadband under Title II, but the FCC has not confirmed this. The public can attend the February 26 open meeting, and it will also be webcast on FCC.gov.

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**New rule on air travel with musical instruments**

The Dept. of Transportation (DOT) issued a rule standardizing how airlines treat musical instruments as carry-on and checked baggage. This rule comes nearly three years after the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 which required DOT to write final rules on the matter.

The new rule states that if a traveler’s instrument complies with an airline’s carry-on or checked baggage policies—and there is room for the instrument on the flight—airlines must allow it onboard or in cargo. It also states that airlines with musical instrument policies must modify them to comply with the rule and train gate agents, flight crews, and baggage handlers accordingly. Airlines without policies for musical instruments must create them.
PAA has been working with a coalition of service organizations and musician advocates involved in this important policy issue. The rule takes effect in early March. In the coming weeks, we'll inform you with tips to prepare for air travel and sources of additional information.

### Advocacy update on performing arts wireless technology

Last summer, the FCC ruled that it would allow performing arts entities that regularly use 50 or more wireless microphones to apply for a Part 74 license. Licensed entities have access to a database where they can register their frequencies to protect against interference. However, last fall, the FCC proposed that entities using fewer than 50 microphones—those ineligible for a license—would not be able to access the database. In other words, there would be absolutely no interference protection for these organizations.

After the FCC’s spectrum incentive auction, wireless microphones may face interference from TV band devices (“white space devices”) expected to operate on the spectrum sold in the auction. These devices have not yet been developed but are expected to flood the market after the auction is complete.

The FCC is currently considering a longer-term home for wireless microphones in a different area of the broadcast spectrum. Such a move in the spectrum would necessitate the purchase of new equipment. This will be the second time wireless microphone users are forced to relocate: in 2010, the FCC mandated that they vacate the 700 MHz band. As a result, many performing arts organizations had to purchase expensive new equipment.

PAA participates in the Coalition of Performing Arts Wireless Microphone Users which recently asked its member organizations to prepare comments to submit to the FCC on these two related issues. Scores of letters have been submitted and will soon be posted on the FCC’s website. Stay tuned for future updates on this issue.

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**Arts Advocacy Day: March 23-24**
PAA is a national co-sponsor for Arts Advocacy Day 2015 to be held March 23-24 in Washington, DC. The annual event, organized by Americans for the Arts, brings together hundreds of arts and cultural advocates from around the nation to speak up for the arts on Capitol Hill. Registration is currently open online.

You can still participate in Arts Advocacy Day at home if you’re not traveling to DC. Stay tuned for tips on writing letters or making phone calls to your representatives to ask their support for the arts.

Upcoming events: PAA in Austin

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PAA is hitting the road in 2015!

In conjunction with its spring Board of Directors meeting in Austin, TX, PAA will hold a community conversation and learning exchange with the local arts and culture community on Thursday evening, April 16 at the Long Center for the Performing Arts. The event is co-hosted by Ballet Austin and National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures and co-sponsored by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin. More details coming soon.