

Audio Description Requirements Expand to Nielsen Television Designated Market Areas 111 to 120 on January 1

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Beginning January 1, 2026, the FCC's audio description requirements will expand to commercial television stations affiliated with ABC, CBS, FOX, or NBC in 10 additional Nielsen Designated Market Areas (DMAs): **Tyler-Longview (Lufkin & Nacogdoches), Sioux Falls (Mitchell), Fargo, Springfield-Holyoke, Lansing, Youngstown, Yakima-Pasco-Richland-Kennewick, Traverse City-Cadillac, Eugene, and Macon.** Audio-described programming is intended to make video programming more accessible to blind or visually impaired consumers by inserting "audio narrated descriptions of a television program's key visual elements into natural pauses between the program's dialogue."

In October 2023, the FCC adopted the *Audio Description Second Report and Order*, which expanded the audio description requirements to (eventually) all television markets. As set out in the *Order*, 10 additional DMAs will be phased in each year through 2035 until all DMAs are subject to the audio description rules.

Under Section 79.3 of the FCC's Rules, stations subject to the audio description requirements must provide at least 50 hours of audio-described programming per quarter during primetime or children's programming, and an additional 37.5 hours of programming per quarter aired between 6 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. local time. The requirement applies to any of a station's programming streams, whether primary or multicast, if the stream is affiliated with ABC, CBS, FOX, or NBC.

The next deadline, January 1, 2026, will apply to DMAs 111 to 120, with markets 121 to 210 phased in through 2035 according to the below schedule.

Markets	Compliance Deadline
111-120	January 1, 2026
121-130	January 1, 2027
131-140	January 1, 2028
141-150	January 1, 2029
151-160	January 1, 2030
161-170	January 1, 2031
171-180	January 1, 2032
181-190	January 1, 2033
191-200	January 1, 2034
201-210	January 1, 2035

As the January 1, 2026 deadline approaches, broadcasters in markets 111-120 should take proactive steps to ensure their technical facilities are equipped to provide audio described-programming and implement any necessary technical

updates to meet the audio description requirements. Stations may petition the FCC for a full or partial exemption from complying with the audio description rules by demonstrating that compliance would be economically burdensome on the station. Stations requiring assistance are encouraged to contact the attorneys in **Pillsbury's Communications Practice** for specific compliance advice.