

Published: Wednesday | January 21, 2015

Hopeton Dunn, GUEST COLUMNIST

Your recently published Letter of the Day ('Hit rogue media houses in their pockets') January 19, 2015 makes some very important points about the need for stiffer penalties and especially financial sanctions against those broadcast media houses that persist with the flagrant violations of broadcasting regulations.

The call for more responsibility and care by sections of our electronic media industry is entirely appropriate and deserves the support of all well-thinking Jamaicans.

As your readers would know, the Broadcasting Commission continues vigilantly to monitor and sanction each reported violation found to be in breach, and to publicly require remedial measures within the powers of our existing legislation.

Given the growth of the sector, this is a day-to-day operation, and while there are many fully compliant broadcasters, a minority continues to be repeat violators, transmitting vulgar or abusive lyrical content or irresponsible programming that promotes violence, denigrates women, and exposes children to explicit and inappropriate sexual content via the airwaves.

Unlike your letter writer, who questions whether the regulator is "ineffective", many others have complained that the Broadcasting Commission's actions are too stringent in the identification of breaches and imposition of strong remedial measures.

Removal of intransigent and unresponsive programme hosts, endorsing management's suspension of irresponsible technical or on-air personnel, requiring the removal of hate speech and murder music, demanding transmission of multiple apologies, and other firm remedial measures have been taken by the commission to bring egregious or frequent offenders, as well as occasional violators, into conformity with the law.

The commission will not relent in the application of these measures. Indeed, we have now directed that they be intensified. Every means at our disposal will be used to maintain acceptable broadcasting standards.

The suggestion by your letter writer that the regulator should 'hit rogue media houses in their pockets' is one that the Broadcasting Commission has long advocated, using different language. The commission has formally requested the Government to enact numerous legislative amendments to the outdated Broadcasting and Radio Rediffusion Act, including ones to enable

financial sanctions to be imposed. These changes would empower the commission better to protect children and other vulnerable sections of the listening and viewing public. It is our expectation that such long-overdue legislative reform measures will be available to the commission in the near future.

In the meantime, the BCJ will continue to sanction errant media houses, conduct media literacy programmes in schools and advertising campaigns islandwide, to sensitise the wider public, as we advocate for regulatory and legislative reforms.

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