

YOUR STREAM, YOUR VOICE: A CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE ON FAIR PAY FOR MUSICIANS

For independent musicians, the business of music often takes a backseat to the art of creating it. But if there is one business issue we should all be watching closely right now, it's the fight for fair streaming revenues. Whether you release your music on Qobuz, Tidal, Apple Music, or Spotify, the rates per stream vary wildly, leaving most artists struggling to make ends meet.

The good news? Congress is finally paying attention. Currently, there are two significant pieces of legislation working their way through the House of Representatives: **The American Music Fairness Act** and **The Living Wage For Musicians Act**. While they are often discussed in the same breath, they target different parts of the compensation problem. Understanding the difference is key to advocating effectively.

2. Organize with ISSA.
You don't have to fight this battle alone. Contact your **ISSA State Representative**. (You can find them on the ISSA website under the "Worldwide Reps" tab). Ask them to organize a state-wide push. If we can coordinate letters to the editor, phone calls, and emails from every ISSA member in a given district, we become a voting bloc that cannot be ignored.

3. Ask the Tough Questions.
As we approach the election season, candidates will be asking for your vote. Find out where they stand. Use social media, attend town halls, or ask your ISSA State Rep to send out questionnaires. Ask every candidate: *Do you support fair pay for musicians? Will you push for a vote on these bills?* Your voice matters. Your vote matters. Let's make sure that this fall, the message from the music community is heard loud and clear in Washington. Let's get these bills passed.

The Difference Between the Bills

While it would be ideal to combine these into one sweeping piece of legislation, they remain separate bills with distinct goals. Here is a breakdown of what each one does:

1. The American Music Fairness Act (AMFA)

- **The Goal:** To close a decades-old loophole in U.S. copyright law.
- **The Issue:** Did you know that when AM/FM radio plays a song, the **songwriter** gets paid, but the **recording artist and record label** get absolutely nothing? Terrestrial radio currently exploits an exemption that allows them to use recorded music as "free content" to sell advertising against.
- **The Fix:** The AMFA aims to establish a performance royalty for artists and copyright holders when their music is played on over-the-air radio. This levels the playing field, ensuring that when a small or independent artist gets played on a local station, they finally receive a paycheck for that airplay, just like they do on satellite or internet radio.

2. The Living Wage For Musicians Act

- **The Goal:** To restructure how streaming services pay artists, establishing a viable minimum wage for music creators.
- **The Issue:** The current "pro-rata" streaming model pools all subscription money together. After the major labels take their massive cuts, the remaining pool is split among rights holders. This system overwhelmingly favors top-tier pop stars, leaving independents with fractions of a penny per stream.
- **The Fix:** This bill proposes a new per-stream rate (set at one cent per stream) and establishes a new payment system that isn't based on market share. It is designed to ensure that streaming revenue is distributed more equitably, allowing working musicians to actually earn a living from their fanbase, regardless of whether they have millions of monthly listeners.

Where Do the Bills Stand?

As of this writing, both bills have been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, they are currently stuck in the early stages, awaiting review by subcommittees.
The biggest hurdle? These bills currently lack the strong bi-partisan support needed to advance. Furthermore, the radio industry is fighting the AMFA fiercely, and the major streaming platforms are naturally resistant to the structural changes proposed in the Living Wage Act.

How You Can Help (And Why It Matters Now)

We cannot afford to wait. This fall, **all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives** are up for election. This creates a massive opportunity for us—the voters—to make fair pay for musicians a campaign issue.
Here is your action plan:

1. Contact Your Representative.

Find your specific US Congressman and call their office. It takes five minutes. Tell them you are a constituent and a musician, and you want them to publicly support both the *American Music Fairness Act* and the *Living Wage For Musicians Act*. Let them know this isn't just about big stars; it's about the economic survival of working musicians in their district.