

Commissioner Copps  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Commissioner Clyburn  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

October 21, 2011

Dear Commissioners Copps and Clyburn,

The undersigned organizations encourage you to take into account the unique and critical concerns of the communities we represent, as you prepare to vote on the High Cost and Inter Carrier Compensation elements of USF on October 27<sup>th</sup>. Collectively we urge you to consider the potentially devastating impact USF reform could have on customers who lack affordable telephone, broadband, and mobile wireless services provided on equitable terms.

Though reform is necessary, we submit the changes cannot disproportionately harm the most vulnerable service users. These include members of a number of historically underserved and marginalized populations and regions, such as: persons in communities of color and non-English speaking communities; residents of rural areas and especially those living on underserved native lands; elderly individuals, as well as young persons and students; job-seekers, low income earners, and public benefits recipients; and imprisoned individuals and their families.

*Specifically we ask you to consider the following:*

**Ensure that end-user rates are not raised.**

Despite the industry's pitch of its ICC changes as "pro-consumer," no single consumer advocacy organization has expressed support for these proposed "reforms." In fact, there is united consumer advocate opposition in the record to the plan's increases in end-user rates and surcharges.

**Ensure our communities do not subsidize corporate enrichment.**

There is no evidence in the record for the theory that the proposed changes would be beneficial to consumers. Access charges for wireless and long distance carriers are already below cost and there is no mechanism to require these carriers to pass on savings from access charge reductions to customers. We urge the Commission to make every attempt to quantify the costs and benefits of these rule changes, and examine the impacts on our communities--including continued provision of basic phone service to rural areas. Further, should the ABC plan's ICC reforms be adopted, it would unjustly enrich and reward Verizon and AT&T--wireless carriers that would reap billions in *net* savings as a result of FCC-mandated lower access payments while also reaping billions more in higher charges from vulnerable consumers.

**Ensure that communities who 'self-provision' are eligible for USF funds.**

Currently, proposed USF reforms exclude community-based networks that have done the most to build out

broadband infrastructure to provide essential services in underserved areas—urban and rural. These “self-provisioning” projects range from municipal networks to private sector nonprofit networks. Yet, they are not eligible for the proposed Connect America Fund. Self-provisioning communities have invested their social and financial capital in broadband infrastructure and services, and play a critical role in shaping the socioeconomic destiny of their community. It is essential that our communities have all available options to build the networks we need, and to advocate for network ownership and operation that provides competitive options and prices that are in everyone’s best interest.

**Establish performance goals for the reformed high cost programs that promote equity.**

The FCC must incorporate explicit goals and measures related to the expansion of broadband to communities of color and low-income communities in its final plan for the reformed High Cost programs. To hold itself accountable for achieving truly universal broadband access, the Commission must include measures capturing the degree to which investments increase deployment of modern networks to zip codes where people of color predominate as well as deployment of such networks to communities in which residents are living at or below the federal poverty line. We also urge the Commission to implement data collection, transparency and accountability requirements necessary to assess whether federal dollars are in fact closing such gaps.

**Ensure state accountability for equity.**

The Commission should require states to institute accountability policies and practices that will enable the FCC and state residents alike to assess whether key reform goals are being met. The FCC should, for example, require states receiving USF funds to conduct baseline assessments of broadband availability (including deployed technologies) and to draw upon these assessments in identifying priority areas for USF-subsidized build-out. Additionally, the Commission should require states to track actual prices of broadband service provided by universal service supported carriers and annually compare these figures to race and income data collected as part of the baseline assessment in order to identify affordability challenges. Finally, the FCC could increase transparency and accountability by creating opportunities for consumers—and those who would like to be consumers of broadband—to shape state policy related to broadband expansion. This should include the creation of Citizen Advisory Boards required to sign off on all plans for use of universal service dollars, regular consultation of consumers as the state develops plans and eligibility requirements and verification of carrier claims about availability, speed and pricing through periodic consultation with consumers.

Our communities cannot afford any outcome that limits our ability to acquire affordable and dependable communications services. It is imperative that “Universal Service reform” does not harm the customers it is supposed to benefit.

Sincerely,

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TURN

Main Street Project  
Media Literacy Project  
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May First/People Link  
Center for Rural Strategies  
Highlander Research and Education Center

Access Humboldt  
Media Justice League  
People's Production House  
Media Alliance  
The Partnership of African American  
Churches  
Media Literacy Project  
Chicago Media Action  
Reclaim the Media  
The People's Press Project  
Esperanza Peace and Justice Center  
California Center for Rural Policy  
Thousand Kites

Institute of Popular Education of Southern  
California  
Generation Justice  
KUNM Youth Radio  
Appalshop  
Community Media Workshop  
Media Mobilizing Project  
Arts & Democracy Project  
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
The Peoples Channel  
Durham Community Media  
Radio Pocho