



July 25, 2017

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: WC Docket No. 17-108, “Restoring Internet Freedom”

Dear Chairman and Commissioners:

The ASPIRA Association, Inc. is a national network of ASPIRA non-profit organizations dedicated to the education and development of low-income Latino youth. We serve over 85,000 students each year in more than 400 schools, helping promising young Latinos and Latinas achieve educational excellence and develop their leadership potential.

As the FCC moves forward with this rulemaking, we urge Commissioners to strongly consider to the impact any potential rules will have on the broader fight to close the digital divide and bring all Americans into the digital economy. As an education organization, we urge you to especially consider the potential impact of these rules on education and access in underserved communities. We strongly support net neutrality and believe there must be rules to protect the open internet from blocking, throttling, or discrimination. But any framework for net neutrality rules that also imposes new obstacles to broadband deployment – particularly in underserved areas – is unacceptable. Broadband policy must, at once, protecting an open internet *and* encourage faster deployments and access in low-income areas.

Through our hands-on work with low-income youth, we have a firsthand perspective on the pernicious consequences of our nation’s lingering digital divide. While an overwhelming majority of white and upper-income families have access to the transformative educational and economic opportunities that come with home broadband access, far too many low-income and minority households lack such access. According the Pew Research Center, 42% of Latinos still lack access to broadband at home. Despite progress in recent years, Latinos are still nearly twice as likely as white households to lack broadband access.

These disparities in home internet access have a troubling impact on students’ educational outcomes. Over 70% of teachers regularly assign homework that requires

ASPIRA Association, Inc. National Office

1444 I St., NW Suite 800 | Washington, DC 20005 | 835-3600 (202) | Fax 1.888.207.1805 | Email: info@aspira.org | Web: www.aspira.org

ASPIRA Associates: Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico

internet access to complete, putting kids without home broadband at a considerable disadvantage. Former FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel often highlighted this “[homework gap](#),” pointing out that “more than half of principals nationwide now cite digital equity as a major challenge in their schools.”

Closing this homework gap requires holistic outreach programs that deal with basic gaps in both affordability and digital literacy. But even the most robust broadband adoption initiatives won’t close the digital divide in communities not yet reached by reliable, high-speed networks.

Federal broadband policies must therefore focus on encouraging greater investment in our underlying broadband infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas. Unfortunately, the Commission’s 2015 Open Internet Order appears to be having the opposite effect. [Numerous economists](#) and [industry experts](#) have reported that the Order has depressed network investment by billions of dollars.

We believe the Commission must find a way to protect net neutrality without jeopardizing broadband investment. If the Commission lacks legal authority to enact a solution that strikes this balance, then Congress must act to solve this issue directly.

We thank you for your ongoing efforts to extend the promise of broadband to every American, and urge you to keep this priority at the center of your deliberation as this rulemaking continues.

Sincerely,

Ronald Blackburn-Moreno
President and CEO