I’m writing to lodge my opposition to the FCC’s recent attempt to undermine an equal and open internet. Docket 17-108, the so called “Restoring Internet Freedom” proposal will disrupt what has been an equal playing field between digital entities of all sizes. The current regulation regime restricts the ability of internet service providers (ISPs) from manipulating the delivery of website traffic has allowed countless entrepreneurs grow their businesses. Undermining the current regulation regime will allow ISPs to band together with internet content providers to favor large and established digital entities to the detriment of potential new entrants. Rather than increase investment in telecommunication infrastructure, the proposed rule changes would further entrench special interests and create an uneven field for competition, likely decreasing consumer choice and increasing costs. For these reasons, I oppose docket 17-108.

The current proposal is said to decrease regulation in order to allow more “freedom” and hopes to increase investment from ISPs to bring faster internet access to consumers. However, there is little evidence that these goals can be realized through the proposed changes. It is much more likely that greater investment would be achieved through having a more competitive marketplace among ISPs. Much of the current market is dominated by a few providers. The possibility of provider some content at a faster speed than non-prioritized content will likely not be a major incentive to upgrade telecommunication infrastructure. The customer base is already limited in choice usually by current infrastructure or geography. Rather than lower prices and improve service, ISPs will likely just rebrand current services in a more complex way while increasing costs to consumers. Structuring internet traffic into faster and slower delivery allows ISPs to sell the fast lanes in packages similar to television programming packages. Rather than expand choice, ISPs would limit market visibility for many small and new businesses.

The current proposal also allows for greater economic concentration and special interest entrenchment among the digital media. Markets work best when they are free and open to competition. The best, most efficient, and most profitable businesses survive while the rest fall away. If ISPs and large content providers are able to collude to decrease the accessibility of smaller entities, they will gain an unfair advantage over potential competitors. These interest groups will be using the rule-making ability of the FCC to cement their current success. If a better search engine or social media enterprise arises in the future, it would face a much steeper climb due to these rules. Limiting, or interfering with, access to the digital marketplace will likely have economic disadvantages in the future. Using the levers of government to the benefit of a few members of an economic interest group to discourage future competition has the chance of leading to stagnation and inefficiency among those companies who are benefiting. Without an open and even marketplace, a few will benefit while customers suffer. Rather than promote a free market, the proposed changes will shelter large content providers and ISPs from those very market forces.

The United States has benefitted greatly from the open and even internet—net neutrality. The push to give greater power to ISPs and large digital content providers is short sighted and likely difficult to reverse. Thus, I strongly oppose the adoption of docket 17-108.