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CapAccess_{sm}

The National Capital Area Public Access Network, Inc.

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July 11, 1994

Mr. William F. Caton
Acting Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M St. NW, Room 814
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Petition for Rulemaking and Petition for Relief in
Section 214 Video Dialtone Allocation Process (DA 940621)

Dear Mr. Caton,

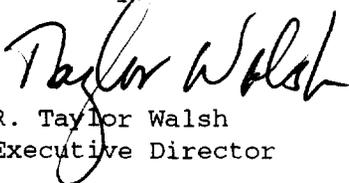
CapAccess supports the relief requested by the Center for Media Education, the Consumer Federation of America, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Council of La Raza, and the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ, in their petitions regarding the implementation of video dialtone facilities.

We strongly urge the FCC to establish safeguards to ensure the balanced deployment of video dialtone - and any other multi-capable digital service - throughout market areas where participating vendors have operations. If these safeguards are not locked in from the start, it is possible that the people living and working in poor and underserved communities will not have the opportunity to have access to these systems and thus will be unable to benefit from the nation's information infrastructure.

The Commission should state unequivocally that video dialtone providers are bound by the principles of universal service and non-discriminatory practice.

CapAccess is in the business of providing digital information service access to individuals and organizations in public service throughout the metropolitan Washington region, making use of simple and affordable personal computer technology. This service is thus a precursor to the more complex and costly video-based infrastructure in question. Although nearly 10,000 people are using CapAccess, we also know how difficult it is to ensure that all corners of the region have equal access to it, become acclimated to it, and learn how it can improve their lives. We urge the Commission to adopt a policy that results in the inclusion of these communities from the outset.

Sincerely,



R. Taylor Walsh
Executive Director

CC: Reed Hundt, Chairman
Peggy Reitzel

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The National Capital Area Public Access Network

The Community Information Network for the metropolitan Washington DC region

Background

CapAccess was founded in 1992 by a coalition of local individuals and organizations interested in the use of free interactive information services centered around the needs of the communities in the public and civic sectors of the Metropolitan area: schools, libraries, local governments, social service organizations, non-profits, and civic and community organizations.

CapAccess is one of many *community networks* in operation or formation around the country. Like most others, CapAccess has been created and developed at the grass-roots, through the cooperative efforts of literally scores of volunteers who manage information centers, train new users, help enlist new organizations, and attend to routine support tasks. This expanding coalition and its independent, non-profit status, enable CapAccess to act as an incubator for many organizations in public service.

People and Organizations

Participants are individuals and organizations around the region, such as:

- **K-12 schools:** several manage their own information centers on CapAccess, primarily for teachers and students;
- **local governments:** in public information, law enforcement; traffic planning; administration;
- **libraries:** involved with CapAccess from the outset; reference librarians from surrounding counties responding to electronically-posed questions, providing an "electronic reference desk;"
- **federal agencies:** agencies and departments have a new charter to use electronic channels to distribute information and streamline service, some are using CapAccess to do so
- **non-profits:** particularly those in education, democratic action, community development, and community service
- **individuals:** whose personal interests are shared by others in the region

Of central importance to the CapAccess mission is helping the organizations in the above areas to get free hands-on experience with this interactive information technology and bring it gradually into the operations of the organization. In this way, CapAccess is a shared platform, or incubator, providing space for services and people, and connections with others in the community who can help new users become acclimated to the medium.

Access

Like other community networks, CapAccess makes its service available to individuals with any kind of personal computer and modem and a connection to the local telephone system. As the service develops other affordable publicly available communications media (cable, audio) will be woven into the mix of access.

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Public access points: working with participating institutions like libraries, CapAccess will support placement of easily accessible computers in public settings like libraries and community centers.

Services

Information:

- provided by local organizations of all kinds in support of their communications and outreach programs
- provided or coordinated by individuals with interest and/or expertise in a topic area
- available through the Internet: information resources all over the world

Connections: electronic mail for every registered user; this includes access to the worldwide Internet

Interactions: in the form of discussion areas (forums) based on a wide variety of topics; forums can be open to any contribution, or they can be moderated; Internet-accessible *mailing lists*, which permit discussions with people who have access to other electronic mail services

For organizations: CapAccess provides space for information and specific discussion forums and other services for those who would like to make information or service available to the public.

Governance

CapAccess is a 501(c)3 non-profit District of Columbia corporation managed by a Board of Directors and a 60-person Member Council organized to reflect the geography and diversity of interests in the region's civic and community affairs. Routine affairs are managed by a small staff. Like other such community networks around the country, most of the work is accomplished by a dedicated and growing group of volunteers; they may be individuals or representatives of organizations making use of the service.

Funding

CapAccess is funded through contributions from local individuals and organizations, grants, and service contracts. Major start-up funding has been provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), local public libraries, and the members of CapAccess. The George Washington University has provided substantial in-kind contributions since Spring, 1992, including logistics and administrative support, and provision of the computing and telecommunications (including Internet) resources.