



Older Adults Technology Services

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RE: MB Docket No. 15-149

Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

I am writing to you to express my support for the merger of Charter Communications, Time Warner Cable, and Bright House Networks.

The organization I founded in 2004, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), is now a national leader in engaging, training, and supporting older Americans in order to increase their broadband adoption and use and thereby to improve the seniors' quality of life.

As you know, the prevalence of technology use by seniors falls far below the rates at which other groups in America connect; over 40 percent of older Americans don't use the Internet at all.

This low rate of adoption is reflected by device ownership rates: only 25 percent of seniors have tablets, and fewer than one in four use a smartphone. Because of such widespread non-adoption and digital illiteracy, it should come as no surprise that 53 percent of those aged 65 and older do not have broadband at home.

To close this gap, OATS helps to explain the value proposition of broadband by introducing seniors to digital technology through a combination of community engagement, free access to broadband and devices at dozens of local "Senior Planet" sites, free high-quality training courses and programs designed specifically for older learners, and a wealth of online resources organized around older adults and the digital culture.

Since 2004, OATS has brought over 35,000 seniors online.

Because of our long familiarity with seniors and the barriers they encounter as they confront the digital world, and because of the central role that quality broadband plays in our mission, we support the proposed merger of Charter Communications, Time Warner Cable, and Bright House Networks for several important reasons:

- We believe that the merger will offer faster and more reliable broadband service.

Without the support of quality broadband, OATS cannot be successful. We operate 24 technology labs across New York City, and we want each of them to retain fast and reliable connections so that our seniors can learn in a productive environment. We are also expanding our operations in new geographies outside of New York City. One such area is the seven-county North Country region that comprises a vast rural area at the northern extremes of New York State. Our new center in Plattsburgh, New York is in one of few areas of the state currently served by Charter. In researching broadband availability options for our facility in Plattsburgh, we were pleasantly surprised by the pricing and packaging options offered by Charter, which will allow us to get up and running quickly with the full-suite of services that we require. Beyond our own needs, we know that having broadband in the home

is a gamechanger for seniors, and that the merger will result in faster and more reliable service that will enable seniors to enjoy the full range of online services and resources related to health and wellness, social and civic engagement, economic opportunity, and lifelong learning.

- We believe that the merger will offer customers attractive product features.

As we understand the proposed terms of the merger, in addition to quality and high speeds, “New Charter” would come with important assurances, such as simpler, more transparent billing and more customer-friendly practices. The company also has committed to no data caps, usage-based billing, or early termination or modem fees. For the many seniors who may be reluctant to “make the switch” to broadband, the availability of clear and simple contract terms is key to reducing the anxiety that often blocks the adoption of new or different technology.

- We believe that the merger will offer customers more economical options.

For older Americans, many of whom survive on fixed incomes, broadband affordability is an issue. We appreciate Charter’s commitment to a low-cost broadband program for certain families and encourage the merged entity to consider extending eligibility to seniors. The present low-income programs traditionally focus on families with students that receive free or reduced school lunch. We hope that New Charter will consider including low-income seniors in the program, because seniors are the demographic that trails the pack when it comes to broadband use.

Broadband technology is central to our mission of improving the lives of older Americans. We know from over a decade of experience that fast and affordable broadband, coupled with free training and support such as we provide, produces truly remarkable transformations in the lives of seniors. We believe that New Charter would enhance our ability to expand and deepen our work, and we urge the Commission to approve the proposed merger.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'TK', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Thomas Kamber, PhD
Executive director