



Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity
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J C C E O

December 13, 1999

Ms. Magalie Roman Salas, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC

RE: Dockets 96-262, 94-1, 99-249, 96-45

Dear Ms. Roman-Salas:

My name is Theodore Debro, and I work on economic development in Alabama. I serve low income and minority populations, and am especially interested in the telecommunications marketplace. As you know, access to affordable technology plays a vital role in economic development. That is why I want to comment on the CALLS proposal, submitted by the Coalition for Affordable Local and Long Distance Service.

As we approach this new era in information and communications, it is clear that we need access reform. Companies have to simplify and streamline the fee structures for all consumers, and to promote competition in the telecommunications industry. That is what we all expected when the Telecommunications Act was passed in 1996. The CALLS plan is a step in the right direction in doing just that.

First, the plan addresses some rural issues. I appreciate their commitment to infuse rural America with a \$650 million interstate access universal service fund. Rural Alabama will benefit from this explicit safety net fund. This will help defray the cost of providing service to rural areas, and attract more competitors to areas like Alabama. More choices means lower prices, and hopefully, that will translate into new products and services, and greater economic growth.

Secondly, the plan helps low income consumers. It extends the LifeLine program, which helps defray the cost of phone service for the least advantaged. The plan also increases the level of support for LifeLine consumers, covering a larger portion of monthly charges. Low-income consumers also can benefit from the lower long distance rates that will result from this plan.

I've also reviewed the Consumer Welfare Study submitted to your office by the Alliance For Public Technology. According to this study, consumers of all income levels could benefit from the CALLS access reform proposal.

I will urge you, however, to keep a close eye on the telecommunications companies. The success of this proposal for consumers will only be realized if interexchange carriers equitably pass on access charge reductions to all consumers through lower long distance rates. I urge the commission to make sure that the companies do this. Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts and concerns.

Sincerely,

Theodore Debro
Deputy Director

- Copies to: Commissioner Susan Ness
Commissioner Michael Powell
Commissioner Gloria Tristani
Commissioner Harold Furchtgott-Roth
Chairman William Kennard

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