

February 21, 2001

To whom it may concern:

I am a regional teacher for the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind. I am writing in response to the possible auctioning by the FCC of FM frequencies currently set aside for use by equipment used in schools for student with hearing loss, Attention Deficit Disorders, and Central Auditory Processing Disorders.

Students who wear hearing aids in the mainstream setting are faced with unique challenges that are not a problem for normally hearing students. Many of these challenges are due to the limitations of hearing aids. Hearing aids are designed for use in quiet listening situations where the speaker is within three to six feet from the hearing aid microphone. Obviously, this is seldom the situation in a regular education classroom. As the teacher moves around the room, getting farther away from the hard of hearing student, the hearing aids are increasingly less effective. Add to that the normal classroom noise caused by the other students in the room: talking, shuffling of papers, moving of chairs, etc. Hard of hearing students are seldom able to hear the teachers voice clearly.

An FM System is designed to alleviate these problems. When using these devices, the classroom teacher wears a microphone and transmitter. The microphone picks up his/her voice at the source, changes the sound into an electrical signal, and transmits it via an FM frequency to the student who wears a receiver. This receiver picks up the FM signal, amplifies it, and transmits it directly into the student's hearing aids. Through this system, the problems of background noise are almost eliminated. The hard of hearing student can hear the teachers voice much more clearly regardless of how far away the teacher is or how much noise the students around him/her are creating.

Of the hard of hearing students that I work with, the majority use FM Systems. These systems have proven to be one of the most effective ways of enabling hard of hearing students to be successful in the regular education classroom. In fact, many of the students I work with are able to function successfully without any other special education services due to this equipment. Without them, these students would require extensive special education assistance. Some may even require voice interpreters or one-on-one aids. It is obvious to see the amount of expense these services would cost already impoverished school districts, not to mention the emotional effects of excluding these students from time with their normally hearing peers.

Already the FM frequencies set aside by FCC are plagued by interference from outside sources. These sources include pagers, alarm systems, radios, cell phones, and electrical fences. Many schools that use numerous FM Systems also experience problems because the frequencies allotted are not sufficient to accommodate the number of systems in place. By selling the frequencies that have been set aside for FM System use, these problems will be substantially more prevalent. This action will more than likely cause these systems to be inoperable. This would be devastating to students who rely on them for academic success.

During this time of proposed budget reform, it is understandable that Congress is looking for any means of cutting spending. But, I urge you to reconsider. The amount of money gained from the sale of these FM frequencies to commercial use is minimal when compared to the amount of tax payers money that will be needed to fund the additional

Special Education services needed by students who no longer have this valuable equipment at their disposal.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,
Lori Wheat
Consultant,
Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind