

Dear FCC:

The increasing consolidation of media ownership in the past 30 years has been well documented. This phenomenon has severely hampered the ability of media to perform its traditional role as a watchdog against corporate and government abuses of power. In addition, it has resulted in a significant constriction of the range of available public information. Increased public access to alternative forms of media found, for example, on the Internet and cable TV does not diminish the importance of the role of traditional mass media. Radio, newspapers, and regular broadcast TV are unique. They are the only sources of news information that all citizens have access to. The information disseminated through these sources is found everywhere in this culture and forms a part of daily life for almost all citizens. We must protect this stream of information from corruption.

One example of the harm caused by media consolidation is outlined in a report published by the League of Women Voters of Washington State and found at [http://www.lwvwa.org/advocacy/home-environment/indoor\\_environ\\_and\\_infant.htm](http://www.lwvwa.org/advocacy/home-environment/indoor_environ_and_infant.htm).

This report discusses cultural and political barriers that prevent the publication and broadcast of adequate information about the widespread harm that indoor toxics currently inflict on young children. One of the primary barriers discussed is media conflicts of interest.

If media were more free to report the news that is important to its stakeholders, more families would know about simple measures to protect children from exposures that have been documented to currently be creating severe and widespread public health effects. Fewer children would suffer from asthma, developmental delays, and birth defects.

Media consolidation has created two big problems. First, it has built conflicts of interest into media. All or virtually all of the corporate conglomerates that own the major media in the United States also own other companies that produce thousands of other products and services. Members of the boards of directors of media conglomerates tend to sit on the boards of other huge corporations. All areas of life, particularly those related to consumer affairs, are affected by this economic interlinking of the ownership of news sources with the ownership of nearly all the other major corporations in the United States. These corporations sell pretty much everything there is to buy in our society, from weapons systems to fabric softener to pharmaceuticals. It has been established over and over that big media will squelch reporting on topics that economically affect their parent companies.

A second major effect that consolidation has is that it takes the decisions on what is newsworthy out of the hands of journalists and puts them in the hands of corporate managers. Accordingly, news decisions are now increasingly made on the basis of short term economic considerations -- the next quarterly or annual earnings projections -- rather than on journalistic standards. For an excellent account of this sad state of affairs, see the book by D.

Underwood, When MBAs rule the newsroom. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. For evidence that this has happened, watch the evening network news. It has become a mixture of sensationalism and fluffy entertainment.

U.S. history is full of examples where federal administrative agencies cave in to the economic powers-that-be and allow them to weaken public safeguards for reasons of economic gain. I hope that you in the FCC who hold this public trust in your hands can resist economic and political pressures enough to make a decision on this matter that accords with the judgment of the majority of media scholars. These scholars say that media consolidation is a threat to the health of our democracy.

Sincerely,

Noemie Maxwell Vassilakis