I am strongly opposed to the proposal before the FCC to restrict the regulations on media ownership.

While there are a wide variety of media sources available to individuals, the continued consolidation of the highest profile media sources is not good for consumers or for our democracy. The growing concentration of newspaper, television, and radio station ownership by a small number of companies limits the likelihood of access to diverse viewpoints and locally-desired programming. Allowing even greater concentration of ownership will reduce competition within the industry and allow a handful of companies to have significant control over the content viewed by most Americans. While there are new options via the Internet, they do not carry the legitimacy or the broad range of viewers. The four primary networks still contain an enormous amount of power and need to be carefully regulated.

Additionally, local ownership is essential to provide local viewpoints, to have local control, and to have a permanant stake in local issues. We have seen little evidence that the "convergence" of different media sources has improved the breadth or depth of reporting or information available to the public and consumers. Instead we have had fewer viewpoints which reduces the quality of the reporting. The lesson of the Voter News Service is paramount here.

This is also true in the area of radio, where two companies now own a significant share of the market and are rapidly buying up local stations and replacing them with national content, pushing out local programming and content. We have seen over the past year the chilling effect that this can have on the ability of performers to express contrary political views for fear of reprisal by a media company that has near total control over the distribution of their product.

Media ownership and diversity should be measured not by the number of providers or outlets, but by the percentage of viewership owned by a single corporation. Clearly Vivendi, AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Newscorp, Bertelsman, along with Clear Channel, Fox, Tribune, GE, Gannett, the New York Times, the Hearst Corporation, and a couple of other companies, control the vast majority of news and entertainment forums viewed by the American public.

It is the role of the FCC to act in the public interest to ensure that the publically owned airwaves are utilized to meet the public needs, not to maximize the profit for the corporations that utilize this public resource. We as citizens need an effective watchdog to protect our interests and this proposal is directly in opposition to our public interest. Instead of relaxing media ownership regulations, these regulations should be strengthened and they should be required to provide more civic programming including political debates, free political advertising, and a number of other public needs.

As the Supreme Court stated regarding the First Amendment, "that Amendment rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources

is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society. Surely a command that the government itself shall not impede the free flow of ideas does not afford nongovernmental combinations a refuge if they impose restraints upon that constitutionally guaranteed freedom."

I strongly hope that the Commissioners will oppose this proposed rule change and be more active in defense of diverse media ownership and civic programming over the airwaves. Please do not abdicate your role as the citizen's watchdog. The public is opposed to this rule change and you should follow their lead in this circumstance.