

NATIONAL BLACK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



July 21, 2004

The Honorable Michael Powell
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 04-242: Verizon's Petition for a Declaratory Ruling or, Alternatively, Interim Waiver and Verizon's Conditional Petition for Forbearance with Regard to Broadband Services Provided via Fiber to the Premises

Dear Chairman Powell:

As President and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC), I am requesting that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provide interim relief to above-mentioned carrier -- Verizon Communications -- to allow it to provide broadband Internet services over fiber to the premises (FTTP) without undue regulatory burdens. NBCC is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan, organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of African American communities and is the largest Black business association in the world. The NBCC represents more than 64,000 Black-owned businesses with 201 affiliated chapters located in 40 states, and eight countries.

Small business remains the prime engine of the U.S. economy, creating two out of every three new American jobs. One million of these businesses are owned and operated by African-Americans. And 90 percent of these firms are owned and run by single individuals—lone entrepreneurs with the heart to tough it out in toe-to-toe competition with the biggest corporations in the world.

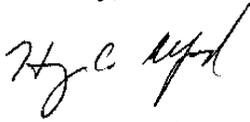
We can do this because so many modern technologies—from cheap long distance, to overnight delivery—equalize the playing field between big players and us so-called “little guys.” For small business, the greatest equalizer of all is the Internet, allowing small firms to run “virtual” accounting departments, sales forces, print shops and marketing teams, as well as on-call consultants. Thanks to the Internet, small, scrappy competitors can solicit clients on Web sites that are every bit as compelling as that of any Fortune 500. The growth telecommunications industry, and broadband, specifically, is a key concern for NBCC. We are very concerned with bringing economic recovery to minority communities and businesses which have been disproportionately harmed by the current economic recession.

In keeping with the FCC's and the Administration's broadband goals, we view FTTP as a new product and service that is critical for industry growth. And service providers deploying fiber need regulatory certainty.

Until the national broadband policy is crafted, we are asking that you provide relief as requested in the petitions that Verizon has filed for mass market deployment of fiber to the premises. In our view regulatory parity for providers of the same services will level the competitive playing field. Such relief will foster competition with the cable industry, which will create product and service innovation, reduced prices, more consumer choice, and MORE JOBS.

For these reasons I strongly urge the FCC to support Verizon's petition. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the NBCC's position on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me, personally at 202.466.6888. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H.C. Alford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harry C. Alford
President & CEO