



The OASIS Institute

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Enriching the Lives of Mature Adults

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May 10, 2005

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
9300 East Hampton Drive
Capitol Heights, MD 20743

RE: Support of the SBC Communications and AT&T Merger by OASIS

Dear Secretary Dortch:

OASIS, a national non-profit education organization with programs in 25 cities, supports the merger of SBC Communications and AT&T. OASIS strengthens communities through lifelong learning and service opportunities that inspire diverse audiences of older adults to pursue vibrant, healthy, productive and meaningful lives. SBC Communications has supported the mission of OASIS, and the merger presents even greater potential benefits for the growing older population.

By the year 2030, 71.5 million people will be 65 or older, making up 20% of the population. This growth will challenge our society to support older adults in sustaining active, healthy, independent lives. For older adults today, the telecommunications landscape has changed dramatically providing increased choices for services and the opportunity to change services. We believe that the merger will not hamper in any way the competitive landscape and that the combined companies will complement one another in terms of customer services.

Technology has become a critical means for older adults to stay connected and find the resources they need. Eighty percent of participants in a recent OASIS technology evaluation said they are using e-mail to keep in touch with family and friends. Eighty-one percent said it helps them feel "more connected to others" and that they are using the Internet to find information about their health and finances – the two greatest concerns to people as they age.

Our organization also found that the Internet is becoming an effective tool in fighting the serious problem of isolation in older Americans, especially when dealing with disability, transportation or caregiver issues. Simple e-mail capabilities can help combat loneliness and isolation, both key factors that can lead to more serious health problems in older adults. Recent studies by the Missouri Foundation for Health, one of the largest health foundations of its kind in the country, further suggest that isolation, boredom and loneliness are major factors affecting the aging population and can lead to serious mental health problems.

According to the recent National Survey of Seniors' Attitudes on Technology, 64 percent of adults age 50-64 and 31 percent of adults 65+ are using the Internet, a significant increase over previously reported figures. A February 2004 survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 58 percent of adults age 50-64 and 22 percent of adults 65+ were on line. Clearly, the number of older online adults is growing.

Keeping seniors involved, assisting them with maintaining contact with friends and family, and teaching them new technology skills, will lead to a more productive, healthy, skilled and confident older population that is prepared to re-enter the workforce and maintain independence for a longer period of time. Older adults are using a variety of communication tools to meet their needs including landline, wireless and the Internet and as the population continues to age, the data shows that it is very likely that the number of people using the Internet to stay in touch with family and friends will increase.

To keep seniors connected, they need affordable access to the Internet. Fortunately, the growth in alternative communications services, including wireless, cable, broadband and long distance companies, has increased the choices available to consumers. As Internet use goes up and choices grow, rates will ultimately go down, benefiting all consumers. The merger of SBC and AT&T should be another positive development for this audience. SBC has made major contributions to provide older adults with affordable access and training to use technology to enhance their lives. The combined company will have greater capacity for research and development of new technologies that will benefit this growing market.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marcia Kerz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Marcia Kerz
President