

Dear Chairman Martin:

I am writing to challenge the proposed merger of Comcast/Time Warner/Adelphia merger (FCC Docket No. 05-192) with the AT&T/BellSouth (FCC Docket No. 06-74). This sort of narrowing of ownership of services vital to the public interest by a few large corporations undermines the functioning of a democracy and of a dynamic economy when it disadvantages individuals, small and medium sized businesses.

The concentration of media power is leading to a crisis in many ways in our country. More channels controlled by fewer business interests damages creativity and ingenuity in development, real competition for the best products/services, and is dangerously limiting access to a broad spectrum of viewpoints, information, and choices. The cost of broadband service also remains out of reach for many households. Americans are hungry for more competition in services. However, these mergers will only starve Americans of this needed competition.

Allowing AT&T to combine with BellSouth will give the top three broadband providers control of over half of all broadband connections in the country. At the same time, the Time Warner/Comcast/Adelphia merger will give Comcast and Time Warner increased power over entire regions of the United States, allowing rates to rise even as the digital divide continues to grow.

The FCC should block these transactions or impose strict conditions to protect free speech and competition under its "public interest standard." If the FCC decides to allow either of these mergers, it should require the following conditions:

1. Subscribers must be able to choose from competitive Internet Service Providers ("open access"). The FCC should also ensure that these companies cannot discriminate against any Internet content or rival service and that every service will be treated exactly the same ("Network Neutrality").
2. Companies must be required to sell broadband access separate from video and telephone service, and at the same price ("naked broadband" or "unbundling").
3. Any subscriber must be able to connect any device to the network (such as a Wi-Fi router) that does not harm the network.
4. Take steps to protect public access programming ("PEG"). Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments. Likewise, telecommunications giants — like AT&T — are trying to eliminate the remaining vestiges of effective local oversight and control altogether.

5. Independent programmers must be able to reach subscribers. We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because providers of video service bundle them together.

6. Any company that owns both programming and video systems should be required to provide competitors with access to their regional sports and other programming needed to offer competing services, so consumers will still have real choices.

In conclusion, I ask the FCC to consider the interests of the people like me who pay the cable, telephone and broadband bills and watch the programming. Many of us already have enough trouble trying to afford broadband or cable TV. Please don't make it even harder for us to find competitors, or make it easier for Comcast, Time Warner and AT&T to raise prices or block local and independent voices.

At risk are the foundations of both a viable democracy and a truly competitive capitalist system which supports it.