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ROBERTO MALDONADO
Commissioner - 8th District
Cook County Board of Commissioners

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December 15, 2006

Chairman Kevin Martin
445 12th Street SW
Room #8B-201
Washington, DC 20544

Re: Internet Access for Minority Communities

Dear Chairman Martin:

The internet has become a powerful tool. Our schools incorporate it into their everyday curriculum. Our businesses rely upon it to reach new customers. Even our government is increasingly providing services and information via the web.

Here in Illinois, there is a large percentage who cannot afford internet access, particularly in minority communities. This problem is particularly evident in the 8th District of Cook County, a largely Hispanic community which I was elected to represent.

It is the responsibility of government to provide all of its residents, regardless of economic status or ethnicity, with equal access to the services, opportunities, and protection government has been established to administer. Unfortunately, many of our residents, specifically those in lower income communities, are missing out on many opportunities due to a lack of technology, such as the internet. We must bridge this digital divide that the internet, and its widespread use, has caused.

All children should be afforded equal opportunities to excel in this country. As a national average, a little over half of our elementary schools have internet access. In predominantly African American and Hispanic communities, this percent drops to less than half.

Within the last few months, I have read several articles that proposed a solution to this dilemma: free internet. Fast, free, family-friendly, wireless internet should be made available to everyone, not just the families with extra disposable income.

The internet plays an integral role in everyone's life, at home, school, church, and especially the workplace and it is vital that we provide our youth the tools necessary for survival in the 21st century. I hope your commission will deliberate on the positive impact it will have in areas, such as the district I represent, when making your decision.

Sincerely,



Roberto Maldonado
Cook County Commissioner, District 8

CC: Commissioner Copps
Commissioner Adelstein
Commissioner Tate
Commissioner McDowell
FCC Secretary Marlene Dortch
Kathy Seidel, Acting Chief, Wireless Bureau
Senator Durbin
Senator Obama