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Testimony to Federal Communications Commission  
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Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

Hearing on Media Ownership  
Chicago, Illinois  
September 20, 2007

06-121

Gentle Persons . . .

Thank you for inviting me to speak today about media ownership rules and the modern media landscape. As a member of the Illinois House of Representatives, closing the digital divide has been one of my passions, for years. The lack of diversity in media ownership since the adoption of the 1996 Telecommunications Act is also an area of major concern. It is my understanding that one company can own up to eight radio stations in one market and an unlimited number, nationally.

Deregulation has led to the eradication of media diversity and local integrity---to the extent that 10 major companies now control nearly 90% of the media content in the United States. This shift has been aided and abetted by government policies that explicitly reward industry giants at the expense of the public interest. While the media moguls claim they want a free market place and "deregulation," it seems that the last thing they really want is genuine market competition.

Concentrated ownership of media results in less diversity. Racial and ethnic minorities make up 33 percent of the U.S. population. Yet they only own 7.7 percent of full-power radio stations and 3.26 percent of television stations. Six media companies own the four broadcast television networks, cable channels, radio stations, and music and movie studios.

The FCC should widen media ownership and not grant waivers to basic FCC rules when electronic media or combined electronic and print media companies are sold.

Also, when the FCC fails to enforce local content and local ownership rules, and local news and feature programs get cut for budget reasons, then the FCC plays a major role in harming local communities, including contributing to the sub-prime home ownership problems in the U.S. today.

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Thus, the FCC media ownership rules have a major and direct financial impact on U.S. taxpayers in having to pay for a lack of local day-to-day community media Sounding Board institutions, in local communities.

Local ownership means local content and community Sounding Board media cooperation  
– and competition for market niches, at the same time

There is overlapping competition for broadcast, cable, Internet, newsprint, PEG (public, education, government) channels, nonprofit community media and other local coverage of local news, including weather, public safety and health bulletins, local sports, community and community service events, classified ads, learning opportunities, cultural and heritage events, government services, real estate transactions, public debates and community assemblies of many kinds. Together, these media in a local market become community Sounding Boards that provide basic health, safety and community engagement information, day-in and day-out.

Thus, the FCC needs to enforce the law and measure its impact on the economic and cultural vitality of local areas, local families, local small businesses and local public agencies. This can be done by requiring all media ownership transfer applications, involving public airwaves, to demonstrate the financial healthy cooperative community Sounding Board networks in each community served.

Also, I believe that local community Sounding Boards are needed for an effective  
FCC Digital TV Transition consumer campaign.

One way to demonstrate the practical need and effectiveness of community Sounding Board networks, is to partner with pilot networks in the period 2007 – 2009, to implement the FCC Digital TV Transition consumer education program. A number of parties in Chicago and Illinois would be pleased to meet with FCC staff, its Consumer Advisory Committee and others to help design and secure funding for a Community Outreach program on Digital Transition. This work can lead to the development of criteria for expanding media ownership and community stewardship, and reducing the burdens of government created by the lack of local content and local media, through local Sounding Boards---media networks of nonprofit, public and business enterprises.

Commissioners, attached to my testimony, you will find a summary of how Consumer-Friendly Characters can assist in several commercial media and public awareness programs. I note these as examples for your brainstorming both in relation to setting media ownership standards, in which levels of participation and financial support by commercial media would be set and monitored, and in other FCC consumer education programs. I am pleased to note the leadership of Illinois-based parties, including Charles Boyce, syndicated cartoonist of the Compu-Toon series, and the Chicago citywide high school newspaper Youth Communication's New Expression, housed at Columbia College.

I urge the FCC to take a moral stand for the good of media consumers everywhere and promote diversity and localism. Please do not allow more deregulation and thus less diversity in our media marketplace.

Thank you.