



Acting Chairman Michael Copps
Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Robert McDowell

Re: WC Docket No. 09-51

June 8, 2009

Dear FCC Acting Chairman and Commissioners:

The National Caucus and Center on the Black Aged (NCBA) began as an ad hoc organization in 1970 to assure that the particular needs of African American elderly were addressed by government. The Caucus existed as an advocacy group until 1973 when it received a grant from the Administration on Aging (AoA) to conduct research, train personnel and serve as a technical resource. The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged was established to administer the AoA grant. Since that time, the NCBA has expanded its programs to include a focus on senior housing, employment and healthcare.

As the FCC establishes a national broadband strategy, NCBA hopes that the Commission will strive to bring broadband to all Americans with low barriers for adoption. Our constituency is among the group of “low-adopters” of broadband technology. Connected Nation finds the average broadband adoption rate of all Americans to be at 50%. However, 45% of African Americans and a mere 25% of those over the age of 65 have adopted broadband at home. These figures illustrate the need for affordable broadband and the importance of informing low-adopting demographic groups of its benefits.

While many seniors do not see the value of having broadband, or even a computer, the opportunities that come with a broadband connection can be particularly beneficial to the elderly. Broadband enables remote telemedicine applications that allow patients to see doctors from the convenience of their homes or local clinics. It often reduces wait times and the need for follow-up visits. Furthermore, a study by economist Robert Litan estimated that broadband-based monitoring could reduce medical costs for seniors by about 30%. Broadband’s benefits extend beyond health care though. With a high-speed Internet connection, seniors can take classes online and connect to resources within their communities.

Unfortunately too many seniors are not aware of these critical, and often life-saving, benefits. In order for more seniors to see the importance of having broadband, barriers must remain low for adoption. Only 15% of seniors cite price as the reason why they have not brought broadband into their homes. Currently, private sector network providers are investing billions of dollars to build out and maintain broadband infrastructure. This investment has enabled affordable prices. If the FCC's broadband plan does not maintain incentives for the private sector to continue to invest, consumers will see fewer options and possibly higher prices.

We hope that the FCC will provide for continued investment on the part of private sector participants while working to bring broadband to every household in the country. Our nation's African American seniors have so much to gain from broadband and they deserve to experience its benefits.

Sincerely,

Karyne Jones

Karyne Jones
President