



Chairman Julius Genachowski
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Broadband Industry Practices (WC Docket No. 07-52)

October 14, 2009

Dear Chairman and Commissioners:

As the Commission works to create a National Broadband Plan, we applaud your consideration of broadband's impact on the disabled community. We at St. Louis Variety have seen firsthand how broadband technology is changing the lives of disabled Americans here in St. Louis. Variety serves children (*from birth to the age of 21*) with physical and mental disabilities in the greater St. Louis region with durable medical equipment enabling them to lead independent and productive lives.

As you are likely aware, broadband adoption among disabled Americans is significantly lower than the rate for people without disabilities. A study by the University of Montana Rural Institute found that only one in four Americans with disabilities in non-metropolitan areas had Internet access at any speed. This is not acceptable given the types of opportunities that broadband entails. Broadband facilitates solutions for affordable health care, continued education, and flexible work environments, making it simpler and more convenient for disabled Americans to lead full and active lives.

As a result, the Commission's singular focus at this time should be alleviating the disparities between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in terms of broadband adoption. As directed by Congress, the primary objective of the National Broadband Plan is to reach every American. But we are concerned that the Commission's upcoming Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on net neutrality could stand in the way. The Commission must consider how these regulations will affect affordability, an important issue for those in our community given our expenses with respect to accessibility go far beyond a simple monthly broadband bill. In 2007, the median annual income for a full-time working adult without disabilities was \$41,000, while the median annual income for a full-time working adult with a disability was \$34,000. If prices for broadband services are increased, it is clear who will suffer.

We hope that the Commission will continue to recognize the importance of broadband for the disability community and we ask that you not take any actions that will jeopardize our access to this life-changing resource.

Sincerely,

Jan Albus
Executive Director
Variety the Children's Charity of St. Louis

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