Girl Scouts.
Public Policy & Advocacy
816 Connecticut Avenue NW, Third Floor
Washington, DC 20006-2701
T 202 659 3780 F 202 331 8065

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Mr. Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is the world's preeminent organization dedicated to girls' leadership development, serving nearly 3 million girl members in every corner of the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and ninety-five countries worldwide. Throughout our 98-year history, Girl Scouts has had a long standing commitment to the well-being of girls and continues to be an authority on their healthy growth and development. On behalf of GSUSA, I respectfully submit the following comments in response to the Federal Communications Commission Notice of Inquiry on Empowering Parents and Protecting Children in an Evolving Media Landscape (MB Docket No. 09-194).

As children's media use continues to increase, Girl Scouts offers a unique perspective and guidance on how to best empower and protect girls. Our innovative research sheds light on the impact media can have on girls' body image, relationships, and overall health. The Girl Scout Research Institute's latest survey, *Girls and Body Image* (2010), found that girls report feeling pressure from the media to have an ideal body type. When they do not measure up to these unrealistic standards, their self-esteem, body image, and physical health can be damaged.

Scope of the Problem:

- **Negative Body Image:** Nearly 90 percent of teenage girls report that the media places a lot of pressure on them to be thin.[i] Body dissatisfaction can result from this comparison, and leads to serious health problems, such as unhealthy eating and dieting habits. More than half of girls (55 percent) admit they diet to lose weight and 31 percent admit to starving themselves or refusing to eat as a strategy to lose weight.[ii]
- **Lack of Role Models:** Girls and women of color are disproportionately absent from mainstream media. Only 32 percent of African American girls think the fashion industry does a good job of representing people of all races and ethnicities.[iii] Women and girls also continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles in the media. Less than one in three speaking characters in children's movies are female.[iv]
- **Unhealthy Relationships:** Competition over narrow beauty standards and attention from boys also damages girls' friendships, which can have serious health consequences since their relationships are crucial to their social and emotional health.[v] Sexualized messages and images of girls and women also negatively impact boys. These negative effects include the development of unrealistic and unhealthy expectations of girls' and women's physical appearance, and may impair their ability to develop healthy relationships with girls and women.[vi]

To address these concerns, Girl Scouts is raising awareness about the importance of promoting healthy media messages about girls and women. We have made a historic commitment to developing programming and policy solutions that promote girls' healthy living and media literacy. In partnership with the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, we created the program, *It's Your Story, Tell It!*, to help improve girls' media literacy skills. Through *It's Your Story, Tell It!*, girls will explore how the media and cultural messages can influence their self-esteem, attitudes, and behaviors. Girls will also learn how to create and use media as a way to express themselves and take action on issues, such as self-esteem, diversity, and leadership. Girl Scouts is also developing a proposed "Healthy Media for Youth Act" to support media literacy programs and promote healthy media messages about girls and women for the benefit of all youth.

Girl Scouts believes all youth would benefit from seeing healthier and positive messages about girls and women. Positive messages could foster high self-esteem, positive body image, healthy relationships, and highlight strong female role models. Therefore, we support policies and programs that:

- Provide a role for non-profit organizations and afterschool programming to promote media literacy among youth and their parents;
- Facilitate research on the effect media images of girls and women have on youths' development; and
- Encourage messages that promote positive body images, healthy relationships, and strong role models for all youth.

The following principles developed by Girl Scouts offer additional guidance on how we could promote healthy media images of girls and women. We encourage the FCC to convene a national conversation on this topic, and use its experience and expertise to examine how depictions of girls and women in the media impact youth.

To Promote Healthy Body Images, Media Should:

- Feature and value girls and women with varying body types and ethnicities
- Portray realistic, unaltered images of females with natural physical imperfections
- Show girls in age-appropriate attire
- Not sexualize female bodies

To Develop Positive and Active Role Models, Media Should:

- Include a diverse cast of female characters in active and ambitious roles
- Feature females in traditionally male roles, such as CEOs or action heroes
- Feature girls and women who have confidence in their abilities and appearances
- Include more girls and women in leadership positions and as the main characters

To Portray Equal and Healthy Relationships, Media Should:

- Show equality and mutual respect between female and male characters
- Feature positive relationships between girls and women, showing them cooperating with each other
- Feature realistic and substantive courtships between characters who fall in love
- Feature male characters who value female characters in their talents, intelligence, and overall personalities, not just their appearances

On behalf of the 3 million Girl Scouts across the country, I thank you for addressing this important issue. We look forward to working with the FCC and with leaders in the private and public sectors to develop solutions that will positively impact the health of our children, their relationships, and their future.

Sincerely,

Laurie A. Westley

Laurie A. Westley
Senior Vice President
Public Policy, Advocacy, and the Research Institute
Girl Scouts of the USA

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[i] *Girls and Body Image,* A Survey from the Girl Scout Research Institute (New York, NY: Girl Scouts of the USA, 2010).
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Ibid.
[iv] Stacy L. Smith, Crystal Allene Cook, "Gender Stereotypes: An Analysis of Popular Films and TV" (The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2008), http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org/research.php.
[v] Judy Schoenberg, Kimberlee Salmond and Paula Fleshman, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living*, A Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute (New York, NY: Girl Scouts of the USA, 2006).
[vi] APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls "Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls," (American Psychological Association, 2007), http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html.