



October 19, 2010

In January, The World Institute on Disability sent a comment to the FCC suggesting that net neutrality regulations would have a negative effect on persons with disabilities. The position against net neutrality that the WID takes is not one that is shared by the entire disability community. This letter is to address that fact and to voice concerns that other members of the disability community have about the future of the Internet.

We concur with WID that for persons with disabilities, unrestricted broadband access is crucial to living an independent life. Researching treatment options, accessing healthcare information, finding jobs, working from home, shopping, receiving news and information, and communicating in alternative formats – the list of invaluable resources the Internet provides is endless for a person with disabilities. Over the last decade, we have seen great strides in technological innovation and broadband deployment that has translated to life changing improvements for persons with disabilities. The WID recognizes this fact, yet they fail to acknowledge that an open Internet has made much of this progress possible.

Net Neutrality ensures that we can access the sites and services we need without having to pay more than other consumers. We can rest assured that ISPs are not blocking certain resources or limiting the amount of bandwidth we use. Organizations and services that are integral to our community can have a web presence without having to negotiate with an ISP to be accessed at a high speed. Many of the innovative services that changed our lives were started from the ground up. It is questionable whether these start-ups would be able to compete and thrive without the principles of net neutrality in place.

Disabled workers are far more likely to be unemployed or working part-time which contributes to the fact that we are one of the poorest minority groups in the nation. Many of us are homebound and it is critical that we have unfettered access to the Internet to make a living, research, and shop for necessities. Equal access to all aspects of an open Internet, whether for business or personal use, is inherently a civil right. Under law, persons with disabilities are guaranteed equal access to government and private services at no additional charge. We must insist that the Internet be held to this standard.

We support research, innovation and any advances the industry is able to secure that would enhance our use of the Internet. However, we do not support the industry's current attempts to block the FCC from protecting our right to equal, unfettered access to content.

Net Neutrality regulations would ensure that the level playing field of the Internet continues to serve the disability community to the greatest extent.

Sign-ons:

- Ruthanne Shpiner, California Alliance of Retired Americans (CARA), San Francisco Gray Panthers, KPFA News Reporter, Mad As Hell Doctors (MAHD)
- Michael Lyon, Co-covener, San Francisco Gray Panthers
- Adrienne Lauby, Co-founder, Host, and Producer of KPFA's Pushing Limits, a disability radio show
- Patrick Connally, Founder and President, Disability Education and Enforcement Services (DREES)
- Blane Beckwith, Northern California American Disabled for Attendant Program Today (ADAPT)
- Dan McMullen, Founder and Director, Disabled People Outside Project
- Herb Levine, Director, Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco (IRLCSF)
- Jan Garrett, Former Executive Director, Independent Living Berkeley, and Former staff Attorney, Disability Rights, Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
- Thad Smith, National Multiple Sclerosis Society
- Clayton Leander, Alliance for Community Radio, Community Frequency Inc., La Raza Chronicles, Pacifica Radio
- Mark Toney, Executive Director, The Utilities Reform Network (TURN)
- Chris Mullin, Chair, Service, Review Advisory Committee, East Bay Paratransit
- Anthony Fest, Rate Analyst California Public Utilities Commission
- Ken Stein, San Francisco Mayor's Office on Disability
- Kriss Worthington, Berkeley City Council Representative, District 7
- Nick Feldman, CEO Dare to Dream Attendant Services
- Lawrence Buchalter
- Peggy Coster
- Peni Hall
- Bob Roberts
- Jonathan Gold
- Tamar Raine
- Claude Everett
- Elizabeth Keir
- Doyle Saylor
- Judy Werren
- Doug Hockin
- Sonya Rodolfo Siosan
- Jan Santos
- Alice Solovay
- Lauren Steinberg

Coordinated by Media Alliance and Ruthanne Shpiner