

January 28, 2021

President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science &  
Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science &  
Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Attn: White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris and Senators Schumer, McConnell, Cantwell, and Wicker:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge the speedy nomination and confirmation of a fifth commissioner to the Federal Communications Commission in the new administration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, FCC action is urgently needed to bridge the digital divide so that all people have affordable internet access enabling them to stay safe while working and learning remotely. We ask you to ensure that these critical efforts are not stalled in a deadlocked FCC by seating a fifth commissioner as soon as possible.

In light of the urgent need for affordable communications during the pandemic, the need for a fifth commissioner is particularly acute. Nearly 80 million people in the U.S. do not have adequate broadband at home.<sup>1</sup> Poor families and people of color are disproportionately disconnected – only 48 percent of low-income households have a fixed broadband connection, and 13 million Black people, 18 million Latinx people and 13 million Indigenous people lack this kind of adequate home connectivity.<sup>2</sup> Based on digital divide indicators like education, income, and English proficiency, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities are also disproportionately impacted.<sup>3</sup> Other research indicates that 30 percent of low-income people of color reported missing an internet payment in the early months of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Comments of Free Press, FCC GN Docket No. 20-269, at 4 (filed Sept. 18, 2020), [https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2020-09/free\\_press\\_2020\\_section\\_706\\_inquiry\\_comments.pdf](https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2020-09/free_press_2020_section_706_inquiry_comments.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See *id.*

<sup>3</sup> See Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Telecommunications and Technology Fact Sheet, <https://advancingjustice-aaajc.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Lifeline%20Backgrounder.pdf>.

pandemic, and roughly half were worried about affording upcoming internet and phone bills. As infection rates rise, broadband remains for millions the only safe way to attend school, work remotely, communicate with loved ones, or visit a doctor.

Leaving the agency in charge of charting the course for affordable communications access and infrastructure impotent to pursue the bold action required at this time would be a serious failing. The Commission faces an urgent agenda including implementing the new emergency broadband benefit; remedying previous neglect of the Lifeline program supporting low-income access to communications; approving emergency waivers for E-rate funded infrastructure to be opened up for remote education; the 2018 Broadcast Ownership Quadrennial Review; a long-delayed proceeding addressing the predatory costs of communication for incarcerated people; reclassification of broadband internet as a Title II service; and a host of other strategic questions including actions in light of litigation, oversight and more.

We urge you to act quickly to fill the remaining commissioner's seat at the FCC by the end of March. Vulnerable and disconnected families need immediate assistance to conquer the digital divide during this pandemic, and they cannot afford the delay of partisan gridlock.

Sincerely,

Access Humboldt  
Access Now  
Alliance for Community Media  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Library Association  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP)  
Center for Democracy & Technology  
Center for Rural Strategies  
Common Cause  
Consumer Reports  
Demand Progress  
Detroit Community Technology Project  
Electronic Frontier Foundation  
Fight for the Future  
Free Press Action  
Future of Music Coalition  
The Greenlining Institute  
Institute for Local Self-Reliance  
MediaJustice  
NAACP  
National Digital Inclusion Alliance  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
National Performance Network  
Native Public Media

New America's Open Technology Institute

Next Century Cities

NTEN

OpenMedia

Public Knowledge

United Church of Christ, OC Inc.

Writers Guild of America West