

June 11, 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

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

We write to convey the rapidly growing urgency to nominate a fifth commissioner to ensure a fully functional Federal Communications Commission.

We recognize the pressing and time-consuming challenges this administration has faced since its earliest days, combating the public health and economic crises caused by a historic pandemic. We also commend the administration on its aim to ensure everyone has affordable access to high-speed internet, as well as the work it has undertaken to meet this critical goal.

The emergency funding allocated and deployed through COVID-19 economic relief legislation and the billions proposed in the American Jobs Plan to close the digital divide are crucial measures. Time and again, your administration has demonstrated a deep understanding that broadband access is critical to education, work, health and wellbeing, and can literally be a matter of life and death.

Yet, as we move toward the second half of 2021 with no nomination for the fifth and final commissioner, the Federal Communications Commission remains below full capacity, which is incompatible with the goal of delivering open, affordable and reliable high-speed broadband to every home. This is all the more urgent given the fact poor families and people of color are disproportionately disconnected from high-speed internet access, compounding grave inequalities that were made worse during the pandemic.

Given the legislative calendar and the diminishing number of days for hearings and confirmation votes, we have reached a critical point to guarantee the agency charged with ensuring affordable communications access can do its work during your administration. Failing to nominate a fifth commissioner leaves the FCC less than fully operational and limits its capacity to most effectively:

- Remedy previous neglect of the Lifeline program that supports low-income access to communications;
- Create rules to make our nation’s networks more reliable and resilient;
- Help guide the deployment of new broadband infrastructure built with federal dollars to make it as effective as possible;
- Approve emergency waivers for E-rate funded infrastructure to be opened up for remote education;
- Meet the challenge of the 2018 Broadcast Ownership Quadrennial Review and halt the dangerous trend towards consolidated ownership in broadcasting by reasserting principles of localism, competition and ownership diversity; and
- Reclassify broadband internet access as a Title II service to ensure fair and equitable access for everyone and to reinstate strong net neutrality protections.

If we are to reach the goal of having a country where everyone, no matter their address or size of their bank account, has affordable access to high-speed internet, we need a full commission as soon as possible.

The FCC, as an expert agency with a mandate from Congress, has the singular ability to act as an empowered advocate to ensure affordable and reliable communications for all. The pandemic showed us the unshakable image of children doing their classwork from fast-food parking lots using borrowed WiFi. We cannot let those students or any family wait any longer. We urge the administration to not lose any more time and to nominate a fifth commissioner who is dedicated to bringing open, affordable and reliable internet access to all and fulfilling all of these vital goals.

Sincerely,

18 Million Rising  
Access Humboldt  
Access Now  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Family Voices  
American Library Association  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC  
Atlanta Coalition for Educational Equity  
Baltimoreans for Educational Equity  
California Center for Rural Policy  
California Clean Money Campaign  
Center for Accessible Technology  
Center for Democracy & Technology  
Center for Rural Strategies  
Color Of Change  
Common Cause

Communications Workers of America  
Communities Closing the Urban Digital Divide  
Consumer Reports (CR)  
DECC  
Demand Progress Education Fund  
Detroit Community Technology Project  
Electronic Frontier Foundation  
Fight for the Future  
Free Press Action  
Future of Music Coalition  
Greatest Possible Good  
HEARD  
Institute for Local Self-Reliance  
Libraries Without Borders  
Line Break Media LLC  
MediaJustice  
Media Alliance  
Movement Alliance Project  
Mozilla  
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients  
National Digital Inclusion Alliance  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
Native Public Media  
New America's Open Technology Institute  
NTEN  
OpenMedia  
Open Access Connections  
Other98  
PEN America  
Presente.org  
Progress America  
Public Citizen  
Public Knowledge  
RootsAction.org  
Social Security Works  
SOMOS  
The Baltimore Digital Equity Coalition  
The Greenlining Institute  
Tribal Digital Village Network  
United Church of Christ, OC Inc.  
Writers Guild of America West