



Consumer Federation of America

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**MEDIA REFORM GROUPS URGE FCC TO TAKE BOLD STEPS TO ADVANCE
MEDIA DEMOCRACY**

Media activist coalition led by Brennan Center for Justice and Consumer Federation of America calls on agency to provide more opportunities for community-based broadcasting in order to check media manipulation by corporate conglomerates.

New York, NY —In Comments filed today with the Federal Communications Commission, a coalition of media reform groups, led by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and the Consumer Federation of America, urged the agency to take a stand against corporate conglomerates that ignore local community needs while profiting from advertiser-driven, “lowest common denominator” programming. Given the imminence of Election Day, the Comments are also a strong statement against the threat of manipulation of news coverage in corporate-controlled media—a major concern this election season. The Comments, drafted by Marjorie Heins, coordinator of the Brennan Center’s Free Expression Policy Project, and Mark Cooper, director of research on media ownership at the Consumer Federation of America, were filed in response to the FCC’s “Notice of Inquiry on Broadcast Localism.”

“The time for a major shift in federal broadcast policy has arrived,” said Heins. The 50-page document argues that media localism—serving the needs of communities for local news coverage and local cultural expression—is a fundamental principle of American broadcast policy. But under the FCC’s “deregulation” policies, community needs are eclipsed by the commercial interests of large conglomerates which dominate the media markets and effectively silence local voices.

“This election cycle has made it clear that the movement for media reform and justice, which grew out of last year’s battle over media ownership limits, will be one of the

central political forces of the decade ahead," said Cooper. "There can no longer be any doubt that owners of broadcast outlets actively use their immense power to try to influence public opinion and the outcome of elections, while they give short shrift to the citizens' need for sound information on which to make an informed choices."

The comments recommend the following reforms to counter the negative impact of media consolidation and to build localism and diversity on the airwaves:

- Assign more broadcast licenses to nonprofit community media, including youth media and low-power broadcasting.
- Develop regulations to ensure that commercial broadcasters provide local groups and media producers with access to broadcast time and facilities.
- Develop new initiatives for expanding ethnic and racial diversity among broadcast licensees.
- Establish mechanisms for supporting nonprofit community media, including a "localism and diversity" fund supported in part by licensing fees.

It is a fundamental principle of broadcast policy that the airwaves belong to the public, and that in exchange for free use of this valuable resource, licensees undertake public interest obligations. But over the past two decades, the FCC "deregulation" has reduced these obligations and simultaneously promoted the consolidation of media corporations. In response, public advocacy groups have rallied to protect local media and demand community-responsive programming.

Other groups that joined in the Comments include the Action Coalition for Media Education, Alliance for a Media Literate America, American Council on Consumer Awareness, Association of Independent Video & Filmmakers, Chicago Consumer Coalition, Columbia Consumer Education Council, Consumer Action, Consumer Assistance Council, Consumer Federation of the Southeast, Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety, Consumers Voice, Democratic Processes Center, Downtown Community Television Center, Florida Consumers Action Network, Free Press, Harlem Consumer Education Council, Harlem Live, Independent Press Association, Listen Up!, Massachusetts Consumers Coalition, Media Alliance, Media Empowerment Project, New America Foundation, North Carolina Consumers Council, Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, Texas Consumers Association, TRUCE, USAAction, Utility Consumers' Action Network, and Virginia Citizen's Consumer Council.

The Free Expression Policy Project is part of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice. Founded in 2000 as an independent think tank on freedom of expression issues such as censorship, copyright, and media democracy; it joined the Brennan Center earlier this year. For more information, go to: <http://www.fepproject.org>.

The Consumer Federation of America is a nonprofit association of 300 consumer groups, established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education, and advocacy. For more information, go to: <http://www.consumerfed.org>.

The full text of the Comments is available at:
<http://www.fepproject.org/courtbriefs/fcclocalism.pdf>.

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