

March 31, 2009

**Via Hand Delivery**

The Honorable Michael J. Copps  
Acting Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: Broadband Opportunity Policies**

Dear Chairman Copps:

As the representatives of policy organizations who represent the interests of people of color in urban and rural communities, we write to applaud your decision to initiate a comprehensive review of the FCC's role in formulating a "national broadband policy," and we look forward to participating fully in your deliberations in the coming months.

We agree with you that an effective national broadband plan requires an interdisciplinary, interagency approach. The FCC must lead a concerted effort by all federal agencies to move from narrowband policies that serve as barriers to the ability of all Americans to benefit from the broadband age.

***Broadband Opportunity Summit***

We recently convened a gathering of leaders to discuss and determine how broadband policies in the new Administration can advance minority communities in key areas such as education, healthcare, and energy. The Broadband Opportunity Summit (the "Summit") that our five organizations recently hosted in Washington, DC on February 25, 2009, included a group of 30 representatives of diverse organizations, which discussed many of the topics that Section 6001(k) of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ("ARRA") instructs the Commission to investigate. Specifically, we focused on how current government policies may serve as barriers in the areas of education, healthcare, and energy and the environment. We discussed what steps the government can take to ensure the "maximum utilization of broadband infrastructure and service by the public" to "advanc[e] consumer welfare, civic participation, public safety ...community development, health care delivery, energy independence and efficiency, education, worker training, private sector investment, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and economic growth, and other national purposes..." including, from our

perspective, attention to minority business and disadvantaged workers participation and training. As a result of the Summit, we are in the process of developing the foundation for a broadband opportunity coalition composed of organizations who represent the interests and concerns of our most vulnerable communities in these areas.

With that context, we'd like to share with you and your colleagues some of our observations on how the Commission can work with other federal agencies to develop a national broadband policy that achieves these statutory goals. As you will note, identifying strategies that will increase adoption of broadband services in vulnerable communities was the Summit's principal finding.

### ***Healthcare***

The Obama administration's goal of reforming our healthcare system in order to reduce the cost of, and increase access to, care could benefit greatly from wider adoption of broadband. One take-away from our Summit was that, if healthcare institutions embrace telemedicine services and ensure patient privacy, we might see an increase in broadband adoption among households that currently do not subscribe. We noted that a national standard for portable electronic health records, developed by the Department of Health and Human Services as directed by the Act, is an important step in encouraging patients to take a more active role in their care – and encouraging their subscription to broadband in the process. The participants also discussed that regulations requiring doctors participating in Medicare and Medicaid to use electronic prescriptions by a certain date would help drive the demand for broadband, but that more must be done in the area of reimbursement of broadband-delivered care.

### ***Energy***

As America attempts to "go green," policymakers and environmental scientists alike are rethinking how we build homes, how we travel, how we consume, and even how we work. Our roundtable participants focused on ways to encourage businesses to adopt more flexible telework/telecommuting policies to reduce traffic, reduce harmful emissions, and increase employee productivity. Unfortunately, many businesses are fearful of embracing telework for a variety of reasons, including data privacy, liability for at-home accidents, and employee monitoring. In view of these concerns, a role for the federal government, through a combination of energy, employment and tax policy, could be to provide the blueprint for effective telework policies, encouraging more people to work from home and thereby pushing increased broadband adoption.

### ***Education***

In the area of education policy, we learned of America's declining global position in students' access to "e-learning." Policy experts in this field noted that the top ten countries in terms of e-learning access share a common trait that America lacks: a

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nationally-standardized K-12 curriculum. Federal law currently prohibits the Department of Education from developing such a curriculum, leading to a school district by school district patchwork of standards that often preclude distance learning. Furthermore, teacher training in 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom skills is inconsistent. Many teachers do not know how to use the technologies themselves, let alone how to effectively employ them in (and out of) the classroom, and lack incentives to do so. Policy changes that would enable the Department of Education to create a unified e-learning policy can help ensure that a world-class education is available to every child in America.

***Conclusion***

There are, of course, many more opportunities for federal agencies to benefit from and boost adoption of broadband, and we believe that we are uniquely suited to assist in formulating policies that are inclusive of the communities that we represent. For instance, one of our roundtable participants has worked with state and local housing agencies to ensure that new or modernized public housing complexes are wired with high-speed communications infrastructure; the Department of Housing and Urban Development should explore policies to promote this approach. Another one of our participants has worked with language minority communities and has experience with the ways in which broadband can improve access to critical translated information in their communities, particularly in the areas of healthcare and public safety. Based on their experiences, they believe that broadband offers promising solutions involving ELL (English Language Learner) instruction for this community.

As a result of the Summit, further public dialog with other federal agencies on how their policies can be adapted or changed to expand America's broadband opportunities is needed. With leadership from the FCC, collectively we can give America the kind of comprehensive, holistic policy that leading broadband nations have adopted.


We trust these preliminary thoughts provide guidance to you and the Commission as you work toward adoption of a Notice of Inquiry at the Commission's planned April 8<sup>th</sup> Open Meeting. We again salute your inclusive approach to setting the nation's broadband policy. Thank you for your leadership on this matter and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues on this important proceeding in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

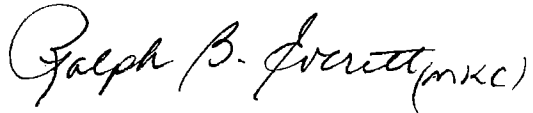
Handwritten signature of Marc Morial in cursive script, with the initials 'mkc' written below the name.

Marc Morial  
President & CEO  
National Urban League

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Janet Murguia  
President & CEO  
National Council of La Raza



Ralph B. Everett  
President & CEO  
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies



David Honig  
President & CEO  
Minority Media and Telecommunications Council



Karen Narasaki  
President & CEO  
Asian American Justice Center

CC: Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein  
Commissioner Robert McDowell