

Minority Media & Telecommunications Council 3636 16th Street N.W. Suite B-366 Washington, D.C. 20010 Phone: 202-332-0500 Fax: 202-332-0503 www.mmtconline.org

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Hon. Barack Obama President of the United States 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

RE: NTIA Initiatives to Promote Minority Participation In the Media and Telecommunications Industries

The first decade of this century has brought exciting new innovations in telecommunications and information technologies. Thus, it is critical to ensure that the National Telecommunications and Information Administration ("NTIA") fulfills its mission of ensuring – as a policy advocate as well as a provider of services – that all consumers have access to both traditional and new technologies, and that policymakers operate from a base of current data and sound science. Our recommendations for NTIA are incorporated in the MMTC Road Map for Telecommunications Policy (July 2008) (enclosed), and I am summarizing the relevant ones below.

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Longitudinal Research

NTIA should conduct an ongoing annual census on minority and women ownership trends. The last such study, <u>Changes, Challenges, and Charting New Courses: Minority Commercial Broadcast Ownership in the United States</u>, conducted by the Minority Telecommunications Development Program, was completed nearly ten years ago. The study found that people of color made up only 3.8% of all broadcast station owners, although they made up about 29% of the population. The report also found that media consolidation posed a serious threat to the future of minority ownership.

¹ See Changes, Challenges, and Charting New Courses: Minority Commercial Broadcast Ownership in the United States (released December 2000), available at http://search.ntia.doc.gov/pdf/mtdpreportv2.pdf (last visited December 30, 2008).

² See id.

³ Id

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Unfortunately, NTIA's collection of data on minority media ownership ceased after 2000. With the continuation of media consolidation,⁴ the implementation of relaxed media ownership rules⁵ since the 2000 study, and the current financial crisis that deeply affects all entrepreneurs and especially minority entrepreneurs, minority media ownership remains at extremely low levels. Independent researchers are only able to approximately estimate the actual minority ownership due to the absence of an accurate ownership database.⁶ Under these circumstances, it is especially critical that NTIA resume the collection of detailed and ongoing longitudinal research to assess and reevaluate the current minority and women ownership trends.

NTIA last conducted digital divide studies nearly a decade ago.⁷ The final study of this fourpart series, entitled <u>Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion</u>, found that although Internet use was growing across the board, Internet use amongst different socioeconomic groups differed substantially.⁸ For example, in December 1998, African Americans were 13.7 percentage points behind the national average.⁹ By 2000, that divide had increased to 15.1 percentage points.¹⁰ The study concluded that large divides still existed, adding that

⁴ <u>See</u> And Then There Were Eight (released April 2007), available at http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2007/03/and_then_there_were_eight.pdf (last visited January 5, 2008).

⁵ <u>See Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC</u>, 373 F.3d 372 (2004), <u>cert. denied on other grounds</u>, 545 U.S. 1123 (2005).

⁶ <u>See Off the Dial: Female and Minority Radio Station Ownership in the United States</u>, Free Press (June 2007), pp. 12-14 (identifying several serious deficiencies in the FCC's data collection and reporting that made a precise enumeration of minority and female ownership impossible).

⁷ Falling Through the Net: A Survey of the "Haves" and "Have Nots" in Rural and Urban America (released July 1995), available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fallingthru.html; Falling through the Net II: New Data on the Digital Divide (released July 1998), available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/net2/falling.html; Falling through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide (released July 1999), available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn99/fttn.pdf; and http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn99/fttn.pdf; and http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn99/fttn.pdf; and http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn99/fttn.pdf; and http://search.ntia.doc.gov/pdf/fttn00.pdf (last visited December 30, 2008).

⁸ See Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion, supra, at 33.

⁹ <u>See id.</u> at 37.

¹⁰ See id.

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"The detailed information in this report provides a basis against which we can measure change. [...] The U.S. Department of Commerce will continue to work vigorously to better measure, understand, and promote the goal of full digital inclusion for all Americans."

After ten years, significant changes in the nation's demographic makeup, economic decline, and indications of negative trends in the original studies and in subsequent scholarly research, ¹² it is imperative that NTIA resume its longitudinal research on the digital divide.

Legislative Advocacy

Under directors such as Henry Geller, NTIA took a pro-active role in advocating legislative recommendations to promote diversity. NTIA should once again fill that leadership role. Through its many research studies, programs, and initiatives, NTIA has unmatched expertise in telecommunications and information policy, especially with respect to the nation's demographic groups. This makes its role as the President's principal adviser on telecommunications and information policy issues¹³ all the more vital.

Two important legislative recommendations that NTIA should make are (1) the inclusion media, telecom, and Internet literacy – including skills, proficiency, and policy – in K-12 education and (2) the reestablishment and expansion of the Telecommunications Opportunity Program ("TOP"). As NTIA has recognized, media, telecom and Internet literacy in K-12 schools is an essential element of a modern education. NTIA previously exercised leadership in technology innovation and education through TOP, which promoted the widespread availability and use of digital network technologies in the public and non-profit sectors

¹² Home Broadband Adoption 2008, Pew Internet and American Life Project (July 2008) (finding little or no growth in broadband adoption at home from 2007 to 2008 for the following groups: adults who live in households with annual incomes less than \$20,000 (home broadband adoption was 25% in early 2008 compared with 28% in 2007) and among African Americans (home broadband adoption was 43% in May 2008 compared to 40% in early 2007).

¹¹ Id. at 89.

¹³ See http://www.ntia.doc.gov/about.html (last visited January 1, 2008).

¹⁴ NTIA Office of Policy Analysis and Development, <u>Children's Internet Protection Act Study of Technology Protection Measures</u> (released August 2003), available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/ntiageneral/cipa2003/CIPAreport08142003.pdf (last visited January 1, 2009) ("In homes, schools, and libraries across the nation, the Internet has become a valuable and even critical tool for our children's success. Access to the Internet furnishes children with new resources with which to learn, new avenues for expression, and new skills to obtain quality jobs.")

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through grants for model projects demonstrating innovative uses of network technologies. From 1994 to 2004, TOP made 610 matching grants to state, local and tribal governments, health care providers, schools, libraries, police departments, and community-based non-profit organizations, but grant funds are no longer available through the program. NTIA should develop a plan for the administration to promote K-12 media, telecom and Internet literacy education and to reauthorize TOP.

The new Administration brings with it a renewed opportunity to restore NTIA's leadership in promoting access to telecom and information technology by all media and telecom consumers. We look forward to assisting the Department in achieving that objective.

Sincerely,

David Honig

David Honig
Executive Director

Enclosure

¹⁵ <u>See Technology Opportunities Program</u> (last updated May 2006), available at http://www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/top/about.html (last visited January 1, 2009).

¹⁶ <u>Id</u>.