Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of
Technological Transition of the Nations Communications Infrastructure
GN Docket No. 12-353

COMMENTS OF THE MINORITY MEDIA AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE, 100 BLACK MEN OF AMERICA, A. PHILIP RANDOLPH INSTITUTE, INTERNATIONAL BLACK BROADCASTERS ASSOCIATION, MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK COUNTY OFFICIALS, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK OWNED BROADCASTERS, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS, NATIONAL BLACK COLLEGE ALUMNI HALL OF FAME, NATIONAL BLACK FARMERS ASSOCIATION, NATIONAL COALITION ON BLACK CIVIC PARTICIPATION, NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF BLACK ELECTED LEGISLATIVE WOMEN, RAINBOW PUSH COALITION, UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND AND UNITED STATES BLACK CHAMBER, INC.

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January 28, 2013
Before the
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I. Summary and Introduction

The undersigned organizations ("Joint Commenters" or "we") respectfully express our support for the relief (i.e., a market test) sought in AT&T’s Petition ("AT&T Petition"), which calls for a national dialogue regarding America’s transition to all Internet Protocol ("IP") enabled networks. We respectfully encourage the FCC to grant rapid approval of the relief sought in the Petition.

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2 Petition of AT&T, Petition to Launch a Proceeding Concerning the TDM-to-IP Transition, GN Docket No. 12-353 (filed November 7, 2012) (“AT&T Petition” or “Petition”).
Our organizations focus on a variety of issues, including civil rights, education, health care and jobs, but we all share the goal of advancing African Americans and the African American community.

In its most recent infrastructure investment announcement, Project Velocity IP (“Project VIP”), AT&T pledged $66 billion over the next three years in the deployment of next generation high-speed IP-enabled fixed and mobile networks.\(^3\) We commend AT&T for its investment pledge and for its decision to proceed with its Project VIP investment irrespective of the FCC’s final determination in this proceeding.\(^4\) This investment seeks to build out the all IP-based network infrastructure that will expand delivery of key next-generation IP-enabled services and applications throughout AT&T’s service territory, bringing these 21\(^{st}\) Century services and other economic opportunity to more African Americans.

\(A.\) President Obama’s universal broadband access goals & the FCC’s National Broadband Plan both recognize the need for IP Transition.

In a 2011 speech, President Obama articulated his guiding principles for the future of telecommunications in the United States. “Every American,” he said, “deserves access to the world's information. Every American deserves access to the global economy.”\(^5\) As the President observed,\(^6\)

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\(^4\) AT&T brings a long track record of service to the IP transition issue. For years, AT&T has been at the forefront of adopting progressive policies to promote diversity in supplier practices, community investment and philanthropy. Black Enterprise named AT&T as one of the 40 Best Companies for Diversity in 2012, available at http://cdn-live2.blackenterprise.net/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2012/07/2012-Best-Companies-For-Diversity.pdf; Diversity Inc. named AT&T the No. 3 Company for Blacks and No. 2 for Supplier Diversity in 2012, available at http://www.diversityinc.com/top10companiesblacks/ and at http://www.diversityinc.com/top10supplierdiversity/; DiversityBusiness.com named AT&T No. 1 “Organization for Multicultural Business Opportunities” in 2012; AT&T was named one of the Best Places to Work by the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equity Index in 2012, available at http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/best-places-to-work-2012; Profiles in Diversity Journal recognized AT&T with its Diversity Leader Award in 2011, available at http://www.diversityjournal.com/5791-2011-diversity-leader-award-winners. Today 19% of AT&T’s workforce is African American, many of whom help comprise the almost 60% of AT&T employees company-wide that are union represented. See AT&T, “AT&T Supports Union Members,” available at https://www.wireless.att.com/businesscenter/promotions/union-plus.jsp (last accessed January 18, 2013). For over 40 years, AT&T has advanced supplier diversity and in 2011 the company spent over $12 billion with diverse suppliers. AT&T, 2011 Sustainability Report: People and Community, available at http://www.att.com/gen/corporate-citizenship/?pid=12307 (last accessed January 17, 2013): AT&T has contributed $115 million through corporate, employee and AT&T Foundation giving programs, a generous portion of which has been allocated to projects to strengthen the African American community.


\(^6\) See “We Can’t Wait: President Obama Signs Executive Order to Make Broadband Construction Faster and Cheaper,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (June 13, 2012), available at www.whitehouse.gov/the-
broadband access is changing the way we live and work, creating jobs and opportunities while fueling advancements in areas such as health care and education. And as broadband offerings evolve, requiring ever-increasing speeds and bandwidth capacity, next-generation IP broadband will become increasingly central to our communication needs. The FCC’s National Broadband Plan recognizes this, calling the transition to all-IP networks, “the great infrastructure challenge of the early 21st Century.”

The beta-trials proposed by AT&T in its Petition represent a sensible method of determining how to undertake this transition. The Petition offers a balanced approach for the FCC as it begins to further its objective of nationwide deployment of next-generation networks. Many questions will need to be addressed and answered as part of these trials and throughout the transition itself. In supporting the relief sought in the Petition to initiate geographically defined beta tests, we reserve judgment, at this time, on specific recommendations as to how the Commission can best address our existing and on-going interest in the provision of service to underserved populations; ensuring high rates of service adoption across all levels of income, race, and primary language; promoting service affordability and the availability of competitive alternatives in the marketplace. We look forward to engaging the Commission and industry—with greater specificity-- on these important issues when actual plans and proposals for beta-trials are filed at the agency.

In the interim, the incremental approach of geographically limited trials provides the best means to obtain stakeholder and expert input to help raise and resolve complex issues in an open and transparent process. With minimal consumer disruption, the beta-trials would enable policymakers to choose the best and fastest path of how to migrate consumers from antiquated 20th century “voice only” networks to the networks, services, and applications that will directly benefit the nation’s economy and the African American community in particular.

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B. African Americans are rapidly embracing broadband technology.

Given the vital role of broadband technology in the African American community and in the digital economy, policymakers should promote policies that spur the transition to IP and next generation high-speed broadband network build-out. Rapid deployment of these networks—both wired and wireless—would bring the benefits of advanced broadband access and services to more Americans, including members of the African American community. African Americans have enthusiastically embraced broadband technologies. African Americans have outpaced the general population in their adoption of mobile technologies (49% of African Americans use smartphones compared to 45% of whites8) and they are more than twice as likely to use smartphones to access the Internet.9 African Americans also lead all demographic groups in accessing social media sites, with 70% of the community engaging in social media.10 Unfortunately, home based wired broadband connectivity for African Americans trails the connectivity in the white community by 17 percentage points.11 Moreover 80% of white Americans connect to the Internet, while only 71% of African Americans do so.12 These trends point to affordability as a significant concern for African Americans when choosing broadband service. Indeed, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reports that affordability is the number one impediment to African American broadband adoption.13 That is not surprising inasmuch as African American annual median income is almost $18,000 lower than the national

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9 Id. at 19.
11 Id. at 10, indicating that “62% of all American adults have high-speed internet access at home, including two thirds (66%) of whites and roughly half of African Americans (49%) and Hispanics (51%).”
12 Id. at 5.
average;\textsuperscript{14} further, according to Pew, the wealth gap separating African Americans and white Americans is an astonishing 20:1.\textsuperscript{15} For most families, laptops and desktop computers must be purchased from wealth, not income.

The IP transition envisioned in the AT&T Petition could provide greater choices for consumers by creating additional advanced broadband service offerings in the marketplace, thus potentially making a wide range of services more affordable for the direct benefit of African American residential subscribers, as well as African American analog and digital entrepreneurs. African American annual median income is almost $18,000 lower than the national average\textsuperscript{16} making affordability a fundamental barrier to adoption among African Americans. Policies that encourage the rapid build-out of more IP-enabled broadband networks would help create additional competitive and affordable options for home broadband service.

Further, from a cost allocation standpoint, the IP transition as contemplated in the Petition is progressive: it would tend to shift the ultimate responsibility for huge fixed capital expenditure costs, attendant to maintaining redundant copper facilities, away from low-income consumers. We have always enthusiastically supported progressive cost allocation (and tax) policies that help lift the poor out of poverty rather than push them deeper into poverty.

In light of the African American community’s interest in service affordability, we encourage the Commission to include affordability, pricing and adoption rates of newly deployed IP-enabled broadband service in its analysis of future beta-trials and formulation of policies necessary to expedite the transition to all-IP networks.

II. Access to advanced IP-enabled broadband networks and services provides critical economic and societal benefits for African Americans

IP broadband networks can provide the African American community with increased access to a range of technologies, devices and services that can enrich our lives, personally and professionally. By approving the AT&T Petition, the Commission would accelerate a digital communications transition that goes beyond the modernization of America’s network infrastructure. It would significantly increase minority access to professional development, education, healthcare, and social connectivity options.

A. Deployment of IP-based networks would accelerate job growth and economic opportunity.

In the midst of economic recovery, African Americans continue to face staggering unemployment. In a national economy that is currently confronting 7.9% nationwide unemployment, the African American community is experiencing higher unemployment at 14%.17

Expanding access to high-speed broadband is a significant step toward addressing this problem for the nation as a whole and for the African American community specifically. Information and communications technology based industries are the fastest growth sectors in the economy and constitute a passkey for extensive entrepreneurship opportunities for African American and urban communities.18 These industry sectors are not only growing, they are thriving. The media, telecommunications and wireless industries now comprise one-sixth of the national economy.19

Moreover, the link between broadband penetration and economic growth on a national scale is well established. A five-year study of the OECD’s broadband market concluded that a 10% increase in

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broadband penetration yielded a 0.25% increase in GDP growth. In the U.S. mobile industry, a 10% gain in 4G LTE penetration is expected to produce a gain in the overall economy of 231,000 jobs.

For the African American community, the benefits of accelerating a nationwide transition to an all-IP network are, as a 2013 National Urban League Institute report concludes, “enhanced job creation in communities hardest hit by joblessness, and… enhanced ability of African Americans and others who are hit hardest by joblessness to compete for those jobs.” Thus, access to high-speed IP-based broadband can potentially create multiple “windows of opportunity” to help secure economic empowerment in the 21st century economy. Access to faster and more robust technologies can expand employment-seeking opportunities as a higher percentage of African Americans (78%) and Hispanics (64%) use the Internet for job searches as compared to whites (48%). Moreover, IP-enabled services and applications would play a pivotal role in the future development and growth of African American business, given that the percentage of African American Internet users researching starting a business (28%) is twice that of whites (14%).

B. Deployment of IP-based networks would help unleash educational opportunities.

Our 21st Century skills-based economy demands a highly educated workforce. The IP Transition, which the Petition seeks to accelerate, would help provide better access to educational attainment that will prepare the African American community for the jobs of tomorrow. Today, African Americans lag in education compared with other groups. Less than two-thirds of African Americans (64%) graduate from

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21 Robert J. Shapiro and Kevin A. Hassett, NDN, The Employment Effects of Advances in Internet and Wireless Technology: Evaluating the Transitions from 2G to 3G and from 3G to 4G (January 2012), available at http://ndn.org/sites/default/files/blog_files/The%20Employment%20Effects%20of%20Advances%20In%20Internet%20and%20Wireless%20Technology_1.pdf (last accessed January 13, 2013) noting “[t]his analysis estimates that under the current transition, every 10% increase in the adoption of 3G and 4G wireless technologies could add more than 231,000 new jobs to the U.S. economy in less than a year.”
24 Id at 21.
high school on time, 12 percentage points lower than the rate for whites.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, less than 20\% of African Americans 25 years and over reported having a bachelor’s degree or more in 2011.\textsuperscript{26}

The expansion of affordable high-speed broadband offers perhaps our best hope to close this “education gap.” Black colleges and university centers would benefit immediately from the IP-enabled services and applications that would be made available if these educational institutions were served by the initial wire centers participating in the beta tests. For those seeking education opportunities, including job training, the spread of IP-based broadband networks would offer greater access to online courses. Improving connectivity on the campuses of minority serving institutions compliments the President’s goal of increasing access to broadband technology across the country and supports the development of technology education and distance learning.\textsuperscript{27} Today, Apple’s iTunes U application features more than 500,000 free lectures from hundreds of universities including Stanford, Harvard and Oxford.\textsuperscript{28} A 2012 federal survey reported that the number of high-school level students in distance education more than tripled between 2005 and 2010.\textsuperscript{29} Distance learning opportunities can provide a means of overcoming the relative dearth of advanced course offerings in some urban schools.\textsuperscript{30} According to the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, as of 2010 only 34\% of school districts offered Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses in English, math, social studies, and science.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} National Center for Education Statistics, “Fast Facts: Distance Learning,” Table 110, available at nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=79 (last accessed January 17, 2013), noting that the number of students rose from “just over 300,000” to 1.3 million.
The potential financial benefits of expanded distance learning through accelerated IP-based network deployment can assist states and municipalities in dealing with the budget constraints currently facing many school districts by reducing overall costs. The estimated U.S. average expenditure per pupil for a fully-online model ($6,400) is almost 30% below per-pupil spending on a blended-learning model ($8,900) and even more dramatically lower than per-pupil costs at traditional “brick and mortar” schools ($10,000).32

Thus, as IP networks become more ubiquitous, African Americans will be able to more easily access educational opportunities in a cost-effective way. As costs are reduced, these savings can be shared with minority serving institutions, increasing their ability to educate and graduate more African Americans, thus enhancing the community’s prospects for educational advancement.

C. Deployment of IP-based networks would advance access to tele-health services and applications.

Access to affordable healthcare remains a nationwide problem, particularly for African Americans, who are generally less likely to seek and receive healthcare services than the general population.33 The growth of tele-health, enabled by high-speed broadband networks, is a seminal development in healthcare. As the National Broadband Plan states, “broadband … removes barriers of time and space.”34 Tele-health can now enable a patient to be monitored at home 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also empowers the elderly and frail to avoid frequent trips to the doctor’s office that might expose them to illness.35 Therefore, encouraging the continued transition to IP networks could help to further expand healthcare access and treatment.

African Americans are in dire need of more and better healthcare. African Americans currently have the highest mortality rate of any racial or ethnic group for all cancers combined,36 and are 40% more likely to

34 National Broadband Plan at 193.
35 Id.
have high blood pressure.37 While African Americans make up only 14% of the U.S. population, in 2009 African Americans accounted for 43% of HIV infection cases.38

Improved tele-health through expanded access to IP broadband can improve African Americans’ quality of life and facilitate the treatments that many so desperately need. Accessible broadband means real-time transmission of x-rays, imaging and other data for medical evaluation by specialists in another state. Telemedicine has already been shown to improve blood pressure and blood readings of diabetics in low-income communities, resulting in fewer emergency room visits and a reduction in hospital readmissions.39

### III. The FCC should move quickly to approve the relief sought in AT&T’s Petition so that all Americans, including African Americans, can experience all the benefits that modern 21st century IP-based networks can offer.

For the reasons discussed above, we support the relief sought (i.e., a market test) in AT&T’s Petition, which puts forth an innovative roadmap toward a full transition to all-IP networks and all-IP services in the U.S. This Petition offers the FCC an opportunity to test the process of full transition in a controlled, structured, incremental way with broad stakeholder input. Such a measured approach, with clear timelines, would limit consumer disruption and provides an opportunity for the FCC to work constructively with the private sector, leading America’s IP transition and bringing the finest in IP broadband technology to the African American community and all Americans.

We strongly recommend that the FCC act quickly on AT&T’s Petition. Expedition is critical because issues of critical importance to the African American community sometimes fall through the cracks at the FCC (e.g., minority media ownership, prison payphones, and equal employment opportunity transparency). Review of AT&T’s Petition should be expedited in order to offer an opportunity to expand IP networks that would spur job creation, unleash innovation, create better healthcare, improve education and promote a better quality of life for African Americans.

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