

**Prepared Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn  
Before the American Library Association  
Washington, D.C.  
June 26, 2010**

Good Morning. Thank you, Emily, for that gracious introduction.

It is a pleasure for me to speak before the American Library Association. In many respects we are kindred spirits. You are dedicated to ensuring that every member of your communities has an equitable opportunity to obtain the resources they need to improve their lives. I share that interest.

We are perhaps even more connected because I am the daughter of a librarian. My mother – Emily – taught me the value of libraries and the critical role they play in our lives. They help educate, entertain, and bring the community together in a way that few other institutions can.

Today I wanted to talk with you about an essential mechanism for educating, entertaining, and bringing us together: Broadband. As you know, the significance of broadband has grown tremendously over recent years. In 2000, only 8 million Americans had broadband at home. Today, more than 200 million use broadband at home.

With broadband, Americans can obtain better educational opportunities, health care can be provided in areas where it currently isn't offered, and energy can be delivered and consumed more efficiently. Broadband is essential for driving innovation and economic growth, but in order for Americans to obtain the benefits of broadband, it must be made available to them, they must be able to afford it, and they need to know how to use it.

ALA has known about the importance of broadband service to our Nation for some time. ALA has long been a leader in educating the FCC about how important libraries are in encouraging more Americans to adopt and use broadband. Years before most people in Washington thought it was necessary for the FCC to develop a plan to ensure broadband deployment and adoption throughout the nation, ALA was a pioneer in studying the role that libraries play in giving the public greater access to the Internet. And for years, ALA was advising the FCC that it needed to do more to promote affordable broadband.

We and Congress have since heeded your advice by creating a National Broadband Plan. This Plan focuses on the two-prong challenge that universal broadband presents. First, we must promote broader deployment of affordable broadband services. Currently, data available to the Commission indicates that 14 to 24 million Americans do not have broadband available to them where they live.

Second, for those who already have access to broadband, we must encourage them to adopt the technology. Approximately one-third of Americans have not adopted broadband at home. And of those people, 36% cite **cost** as the main reason they do not have high-speed Internet at home, and 22% cite digital literacy factors for the reason they do not subscribe.

The good news is that the National Broadband Plan has a number of sound recommendations about policies the Nation can adopt to address both of these challenges. A number of these recommendations directly support libraries' efforts to promote deployment and adoption of broadband. I will focus the remainder of my remarks on those recommendations.

### **Universal Service and other Deployment Recommendations**

The **most significant** recommendation for making broadband available to all Americans is the proposal to overhaul the Universal Service Fund. This program has been a tremendous success in providing telephone service to areas where there is simply no "business case" to operate.

One of the most successful features of the Universal Service Fund to date has been the E-rate program. The Commission has already taken steps to update E-rate in order to ensure that schools and libraries can make the most out of those funds. For one, the Plan recommends that the FCC take steps to ensure that the E-rate program accounts for inflation. The E-rate program is currently subject to an annual funding cap of \$2.25 billion. But the National Broadband Plan estimates that the E-rate program's annual spending has fallen by about \$650 million in inflation-adjusted dollars since the program began. Therefore, to maintain the purchasing power of the current E-rate program -- and to enable continued support for high speed broadband and internal connections in the future -- the Plan wisely recommends that the federal government index the current \$2.25 billion cap on E-rate disbursements.

The Plan also recommends that the FCC examine methods to streamline the E-rate application process and to give schools and libraries more flexibility to find the lowest cost broadband solutions. In order to ensure that schools and libraries have robust broadband connections and the capability to deliver that capacity to classrooms and computer rooms, the Plan recommends that the FCC develop ways that funding for internal connections and wiring can be made available to more E-rate applicants. Last month, the FCC adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that begins the process for the FCC to take steps to implement all those recommended changes to the E-rate program.

Another significant recommendation that I strongly support is the creation of a Unified Community Anchor Network that would enable libraries and other anchor institutions to better use their connectivity to improve the lives of all people in their communities. The Plan envisions that this Unified Community Anchor Network could learn from the non-profit, research and education broadband networks -- or R & E networks -- that have helped a number of research institutions in the past.

States and higher education institutions created these R & E networks with the help of funding from two different federal programs -- the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program and the Broadband Initiatives Program. These R & E networks played a central role in the development and growth of the Internet. Two of the more well known networks that assist research institutions are Internet2 and National Lambda Rail.

Currently, R&E networks provide high-speed service to 66,000 community anchor institutions. That is a good start. But, when you consider that there are over 210,000 anchor institutions, then you realize that the federal government and other stakeholders should do a better job of leveraging the power of R&E networks to bring more high speed connectivity to our Nation. That is why Internet2, National Lambda Rail, ALA, and others have called upon the federal government to create the Unified Community Anchor Network, or UCAN, that would support and assist anchor institutions in obtaining and utilizing broadband connectivity.

I was pleased to see that the National Broadband Plan endorses this recommendation. Expanding the R&E network model to other anchor institutions could offer tremendous benefits because many community institutions lack the resources to maximize their use of broadband. The Plan also discusses a number of useful roles that the UCAN could play in helping community institutions enhance their use of broadband.

First, the UCAN could help establish federal and state coordinators and consortia of anchor institutions. These coordinators would help secure broadband connections and would also provide hands-on experience and capacity in the building and running of networks. Second, the UCAN could have a national procurement role in negotiating bulk equipment and broadband service agreements. It could then distribute this equipment and services to community institutions. Third, the UCAN could provide a platform for interconnected networks to share resources and applications and provide training opportunities.

In my opinion, if successfully implemented, the UCAN could facilitate collaboration on network design and on a number of other relevant factors. This could result in lower costs and a far more efficient and effective use of broadband by these institutions. The UCAN may also remove barriers to entry and support efforts to empower all of our community institutions.

### **Adoption Recommendations**

As ALA has recognized, however, “access to broadband does not constitute adoption.” I agree. The federal government needs more than innovative deployment policies to enable all Americans to benefit from greater access to broadband. To achieve this ambitious goal, we must also focus on promoting greater adoption of broadband.

I endorse the National Broadband Plan’s emphasis that we must encourage more of our citizens to subscribe to those services at home. However, I also fully support ALA’s position that, even as we focus on broadband adoption at home, we must continue to support the efforts of libraries and other anchor institutions which have served such a critical role in educating the public about how to make greater use of broadband services. FCC surveys support the position that we must continue to focus on digital literacy. About 22 percent of the nearly 100 million Americans, who currently do not subscribe to broadband at home, cite digital literacy as the primary reason they not yet adopted broadband.

Our country has long recognized the power of education and information, particularly for those who face other disadvantages. Frederick Douglass once said, “Once you learn to read, you will forever be free.” Nothing can open more doors for a person than literacy. But knowing how to read is no longer sufficient to be “literate” in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These surveys about broadband use and adoption make clear that basic literacy must be supplemented with digital literacy.

Library professionals are the front line warriors of the adoption battle. Your daily exposure to the public in over 122,000 libraries is something no federal agency can duplicate. As a result, you can provide us with important information about how we can address our Nation’s digital literacy challenges.

One adoption program contained in the National Broadband Plan that I believe has great potential is the National Digital Literacy Program. This Program will consist of a National Digital Literacy Corps; a federal government initiative to bolster the capacity of libraries and community centers; and an Online Skills portal for free, basic digital skills training.

The central feature in this program, the proposed National Digital Literacy Corps, is similar to programs like AmeriCorps and SeniorCorps. The Digital Literacy Corps will mobilize hundreds of digital ambassadors in local communities across the country. This is about neighbors helping neighbors to get online. The Corps can target vulnerable communities with below-average adoption rates like low-income housing developments, rural towns, Tribal lands, and areas populated primarily by racial and ethnic minorities.

The Commission already has experience in a related program that gives us confidence in the ability of the Digital Literacy Corps to succeed. During the waning months of the Digital Television, or DTV, transition, the FCC enlisted the help of AmeriCorps to go into communities across the country to help consumers hook up their converter boxes in order to ensure that they would continue to receive free, over-the-air television following the transition. Young men and women fanned out across the country – from right here in Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Denver, and Los Angeles. They were welcomed into people’s homes, and helped them get ready for the transition and beyond. I know that many of you played an important role as well.

That same spirit can be applied to the longer-term goal of helping our nation’s citizens gain the necessary digital literacy skills to participate fully in all that broadband has to offer. Using people from within the community to help their neighbors can go a long way to ensuring that people are able to use the Internet safely, and to its fullest potential.

Some non-adopters, particularly older Americans and those who are not touched by technology in their communities, may be uncomfortable operating a computer or might be worried that being online exposes them to excessive dangers. Helping those people understand the basics about computers and the Internet may be enough to get them online.

A recent study commissioned by the Social Science Research Council highlighted the role of communities in supporting digital literacy. Non-adopters and new users, especially those in low income and minority communities, often rely on the assistance of others to get online or provide one-on-one support. This fact is also why we recognize the need for continuing investment in public access points like libraries and community based organizations.

We have talented young people graduating college committed to doing volunteer work in their communities, who may be unable to find jobs right away. And we have workers laid-off mid-career searching for employment opportunities that require a new set of skills. The Digital Literacy Corps can put these people to work building our nation's digital skills.

No matter how successful policies to promote broadband adoption at home may be, we must continue to help libraries, and other anchor institutions, enhance their digital literacy programs. In March 2010, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, or IMLS, released its report on "How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries." The report compiles surveys of library patrons and it includes the following interesting statistic: "78 percent of public access technology users also have access to a computer and Internet network somewhere else."

This statistic suggests that increased subscription to broadband services at home does not necessarily result in reduced demand for broadband services at libraries. Libraries have access to databases and other subscription broadband services that people cannot afford, or choose not to subscribe to. That is because people only use these services on an intermittent basis. Therefore, it is not cost effective for people to subscribe to those services. For these reasons, increased adoption of broadband at home can result in increased use of broadband services at anchor institutions.

In other words, the digital literacy challenges that libraries face may evolve as more Americans subscribe to broadband at home; but the need for digital literacy services at libraries will still continue.

That is why, another significant part of this National Digital Literacy Program, is the Plan's recommendation that Congress, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should commit to increase the capacity of institutions that build the digital literacy skills of people within local communities. Libraries, and other anchor institutions, need additional resources to continue to serve as access points and partners in achieving the country's digital literacy goals.

IMLS should develop guidelines for public access technology that will help libraries and anchor institutions assess their needs for public access workstations, portable devices, and bandwidth. IMLS should work with these organizations to develop these guidelines and review them annually to reflect changing technology and practices. After public access technology guidelines are developed, Congress should then consider providing additional public funds to expand organizational training and capacity. These funds would enhance connectivity, hardware and personnel training at libraries and other public access points and shorten the wait for broadband access at those sites.

The third part of the National Digital Literacy Program is the recommendation that the federal government launch an Online Digital Literacy Portal that would provide, to every American, access to free, age-appropriate content that imparts digital skills. This content should be available in a user's native language and should meet federal accessibility requirements. The Plan recommends that the FCC partner with the technology industry and education sector to approve or create high-quality online lessons that users can access and use at their own pace. The experience that you have learned in providing digital literacy training to the members of your communities could prove invaluable in the development of this Online Digital Literacy Portal.

I am confident that additional public-private ventures will continue to emerge, because universal broadband adoption is in the best interests of network operators and consumers alike.

### Closing

The Internet has transformed the manner in which individuals, businesses, and government interact with one another. Libraries will continue to play an important role within their communities by helping the public take advantage of this new technologically advanced environment. I applaud the advocacy efforts of ALA and its members. Your tireless work in educating the FCC, and other government agencies, played a key role in the development of the National Broadband Plan. I know ALA will stay engaged and continue to make substantial contributions to this and other important domestic policies.

Thank you. I welcome any questions you might have.