

**Testimony of Mignon L. Clyburn, Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
Before the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology
Oversight of the Federal Communications Commission
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Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to once again appear before you this morning to share my priorities and vision for a more connected America.

Nearly four months ago, in testimony before this Subcommittee, I outlined my mantra of community, community, community. Building on this theme, I launched a #ConnectingCommunities tour as a way to hear first-hand about the opportunities and challenges of bringing affordable, diverse and competitive communications services to all Americans.

Last month, I traveled to the Ranking Member's district and met several key innovators who are using technology to drive advancements in healthcare, broadband infrastructure, connectivity and viewpoint diversity. Next month I will travel to Congressman Luján's district to learn about the unique communications needs of Tribal communities.

The concept of connecting communities can take many forms. A Silicon Valley-based children's hospital and a 9-1-1 call center in Charleston, South Carolina may on the surface appear worlds apart when in fact, they share a common thread of using technology to connect their communities. As I travel the country, people voice a common refrain for robust competition, affordably-priced communications services and policies that will enable innovation to flourish.

Broadband is the way a 21st century America connects communities, providing them the tools needed to seek employment; access government services; communicate with healthcare professionals and so much more. It is with this in mind that I continue to prioritize affordable broadband opportunities.

Modernizing our Lifeline program is a momentous step in bringing affordable broadband to more Americans, but we can and must do more to make sure those economically disadvantaged are not priced out of digital opportunity. Broadband is not truly available unless it is affordable for all Americans.

How can we make this happen? First by starting with better data and a thorough analysis of consumer broadband costs. It also means making sure that affordability is a factor in how the Commission evaluates technology transitions and moving forward on a permanent Mobility Fund to bring the benefits of affordable mobile broadband to those currently without.

Our great nation is on the cusp of ushering in the next generation of wireless broadband technologies with the Commission's consideration, in just two days, of an order to open up over 10 gigahertz of high band spectrum for innovative 5G services. 5G has tremendous potential for connecting communities when it comes to healthcare, interconnected learning and Smart Cities. With an ever increasing percentage of low-income Americans reliant on mobile broadband for online access, it is imperative that we ensure they can reap the benefits of 5G and are not left in the digital darkness. We must ensure that we create a regulatory regime that will not only incite innovation and robust market participation, but also foster deployment of affordable next generation mobile broadband to urban and rural communities alike.

But my quest to connect all communities is not limited to broadband. It is also about examining how to best promote the availability of diverse and independent sources of video programming. Independent and diverse programmers from every conceivable ideological spectrum have told me that when it comes to offering much requested, desired and needed niche programming to the masses, they often face insurmountable challenges.

These challenges range from simply being unable to acquire carriage; to difficulties in receiving fair or reasonable contract terms; to prohibitions on growing their online distribution model because program distribution access is often restricted via contract.

The Commission heard these concerns, adopted a Notice of Inquiry in February and the response has been tremendous. More than 36,000 comments were filed in the docket, including many by individual consumers.

I am working with Chairman Wheeler to determine next steps, but no matter the outcome, I believe the Commission has come out of this fact finding exercise better positioned to identify solutions that can enhance our access to independent and diverse voices.

Finally, I continue to believe that transparency should be a driving principle in the Commission's work to promote consumer choice, competition and innovation. In practice, this means that every consumer has a right to know exactly what they will pay each month for phone, internet or pay-TV service, before they get their first month's bill.

It should come as no surprise that billing issues rank among the top consumer complaints at the FCC. For the first half of 2016, when excluding Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) related issues, nearly 30 percent of tickets filed with the agency's consumer help center related to billing. This translates to more than 27,000 complaints in just six months. Knowing of these consumer frustrations, I partnered with Congressman Doyle on an Op-Ed calling for the nation's communications providers to lead the way by voluntarily improving transparency and disclosure of "below-the-line" fees. Enhanced transparency will ensure that when consumers sign up for service, either online or in-store, they will not have to wait for their first bill to learn what their total monthly costs will be. Consistent with this Subcommittee's bipartisan adoption of the *Small Business Broadband Deployment Act*, I believe that enhanced transparency can come about without unduly harming the nation's smallest broadband providers.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my priorities with you this morning. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.