

June 28, 2021

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Acting Chairwoman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

On inauguration day, President Joseph Biden signed an executive order on racial equity that provides our country with a concrete opportunity to address and redress the harm that federal policies have caused to communities of color.¹ The President’s executive order directs executive agencies and strongly encourages independent agencies like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to “assess” whether their “programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups.”²

We are writing today to strongly encourage the FCC to conduct such an assessment to address and redress the harm the agency’s policies and programs have caused Black and brown communities and identify the affirmative steps the agency commits to taking to break down barriers to just media and telecommunication practices.

Today, people of color own and control just 6 percent of our nation’s full-power TV stations, 7 percent of commercial FM radio stations and 12 percent of commercial AM radio stations despite making up more than 40 percent of the U.S. population.³ As of 2017, Black Americans owned or controlled less than 1 percent of television stations.⁴ Although many journalists and artists of color have used their talent to ensure critical stories about their communities are being

¹ *Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, White House (Jan. 20, 2021) (“*Executive Order*”), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

² *Id.*, Sec. 1.

³ FCC, Media Bureau, Industry Analysis Division, Fourth Report on Ownership of Broadcast Stations, Industry Analysis Division of the Media Bureau (rel. Feb. 2020), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-161A1.pdf>

⁴ The Abysmal State of Media Ownership Diversity in America. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (Dec 2020). <https://civilrights.org/blog/the-abysmal-state-of-media-ownership-diversity-in-america/>

told, our nation’s big media companies nevertheless continue to stereotypically depict people of color as being a threat or a burden to society. Historic federal policies are a primary reason why structural inequities exist in our nation’s media and telecommunication systems today.⁵ FCC policies, license decisions and inaction have had the result of effectively excluding people of color from media ownership opportunities. Our nation’s first radio and TV licenses were awarded by the Federal Radio Commission and then its successor, the FCC, during an era of Jim Crow segregation. The previous administration's efforts to consolidate the media marketplace limited ownership opportunities for people of color and women. ⁶

Meanwhile, FCC policies have left millions of households unable to afford home wireline broadband services. Overall, nearly 80 million people are without adequate home internet service — including 13 million Black people, 18 million Latinx people and 1.3 million Indigenous people.⁷ The lack of affordable broadband has left too many households of color unable to use the internet to take care of the health and well-being of their families, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The president’s executive order on racial equity comes at a time when our country is reckoning with the issue of systemic racism in our society. Journalists of color are forcing media companies to address the racial inequities within their newsrooms. Both the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Kansas City Star* published an apology last year for their papers’ history of racism.⁸ As President Biden’s executive order noted: “entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies, and in our public and private institutions, have often denied that equal opportunity to individuals and communities” and “our nation deserves an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda that matches the scale of the opportunities and challenges that we face.”⁹

We are heartened by this administration’s stated commitment to racial equity, and your own recent comments when you said, “I believe we should prioritize diversity and expanded opportunity.” We look forward to hearing about your commitment to undertake this critical effort at the FCC and working collaboratively to address these issues.

⁵ The Ivory Group, *Whose Spectrum Is It Anyway: Historical Study of Market Entry Barriers, Discrimination and Changes in Broadcast and Wireless Licensing*, 2-3 (As Prepared for the Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission) (2000), https://transition.fcc.gov/opportunity/meb_study/historical_study.pdf.

⁶ Media 2070, *Media 2070: An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations*, Free Press, 66-78 (Oct. 6, 2020), <https://mediareparations.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/media-2070.pdf>.

⁷ Written Testimony of Matthew F. Wood, Vice President of Policy and General Counsel, Free Press Action, “Connecting America: Broadband Solutions to Pandemic Problems,” Congress of the United States House of Representatives, Before Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, (Feb. 17, 2021).

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF16/20210217/111199/HHRG-117-IF16-Wstate-WoodM-20210217-U2.pdf>

⁸ Alexandria Neason, *On Atonement*, Columbia Journalism Review (Jan. 28, 2021), https://www.cjr.org/special_report/apologies-news-racism-atonement.php.

⁹ *Executive Order*, Sec. 1.

Sincerely,



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

/s/

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

/s/

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

/s/

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Val B. Demings
Member of Congress

/s/

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

/s/

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

/s/

Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

/s/

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/

Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

/s/

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

/s/

Andy Levin
Member of Congress

/s/

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

/s/

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

/s/

Bennie Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/

Marie Newman
Member of Congress

/s/

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress