

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS  
ON THE REINSTATEMENT OF  
BROADCAST WORKFORCE DIVERSITY DATA COLLECTION  
DECEMBER 11, 2023**

Diversity matters. This is particularly clear in the media space, where representation is not abstract or hypothetical – it directly impacts what stories are told, and who gets to tell them. Who sits in front of the camera; who decides what is newsworthy; who is in charge of hiring and firing. All of these factors influence what news gets reported and what doesn't; what programming we see, and what we don't. And in turn, that shapes how we see the world.

As an FCC Commissioner, I believe the path forward is clear – we must reinstate our collection of broadcast workforce diversity data. Collecting this data – which we are statutorily required to do – will help the agency and Congress better understand the landscape of the media workforce.

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I raised the urgent need to restart the collection of this EEO data back in 2019, along with Congresswoman Clarke and Senator Van Hollen. But to fully understand the scope of the issue here, we have to go back much further.

Let's go all the way back to 1970. That's when the FCC, under its public interest authority, began requiring broadcasters to submit annual employment reports listing the composition of their workforce in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Let's fast forward to 1992. That's when Congress, after seeing the FCC collect this data for 22 years, amended the Communications Act to affirm the Commission's authority to do so. Specifically, Congress enacted a new section 334 of the Act, requiring the Commission to maintain its existing EEO regulations, including its collection of this workforce diversity data on Form 395-B. We have fallen down on that statutory duty for far too long.

Until now. In 2021, we resurrected the docket, beginning the long-overdue work of assessing and addressing comments regarding our statutory duty to collect workforce diversity data. The comments are in. The record is complete. It has been more than 20 years since the Commission paused its collection of this data, but it is time, in fact past time, for us to resume our responsibility.

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Some might ask, why now? What are the benefits of reinstating this requirement? Fulfilling an unmet statutory obligation would be enough. But the advantages go far beyond that.

We know how critical it is to have diversity in our media organizations. It's simple – a successful media organization serves its viewers, listeners, and readers. And an organization does that by ensuring that its employees, its decisionmakers, reflect those viewers, listeners, and readers, and can speak for and to them.<sup>1</sup> Let me share an example that hits close to home. In December 2020, the Kansas City Star issued an apology, acknowledging that over decades through its news coverage the paper had “disenfranchised, ignored, and scorned generations of Black Kansas Citizens” and “robbed an entire community of opportunity, dignity, justice and recognition.” The paper explained: “Like most metro newspapers of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, The Star was a white newspaper produced by white reporters and editors for white readers and advertisers.”<sup>2</sup> These poignant words capture what's at stake here. Certainly, individual employees and candidates are harmed by such a work environment. But whole communities are harmed when they are subjected to content that lacks balance, fairness, or accuracy.

We must get our arms around this issue – and as always with good government, we start with data. As Congress intended, the Commission must reinstate its rules requiring broadcasters to file workforce composition data. Without a reliable window into these workplaces, we may never be able to fully understand the scope of the issue. But with that window, the Commission will be able to monitor employment trends in the industry – as we know, a dynamic and fast-changing one – and report to Congress on its learnings.

In doing so, we will be serving one of our highest goals in broadcasting – ensuring that broadcasters provide programming that is responsive to the needs and interests of their community of license. A station is best placed to do so when its employees reflect the full diversity of that community.

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<sup>1</sup> See generally Alicia W. Stewart, “Why Newsroom Diversity Works,” Nieman Reports (June 10, 2015), <https://niemanreports.org/articles/why-newsroom-diversity-works/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Fannin, “The truth in Black and white: An apology from the Kansas City Star,” The Kansas City Star (Dec. 20, 2020), <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article247928045.html>. Other papers, including the LA Times, have made similar public apologies. See “Editorial: An examination of The Times’ failures on race, our apology and a path forward,” Los Angeles Times (Sept. 27, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-27/los-angeles-timesapology-racism>.