Bill of Media Rights

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Preamble
A free and vibrant media, full of diverse and competing voices, is the lifeblood of America's democracy and culture, as well as an engine of growth for its economy. Yet, in recent years, massive and unprecedented corporate consolidation has dangerously contracted the number of voices in our nation's media. While some argue we live in an age of unprecedented diversity in media, the reality is that the vast majority of America's news and entertainment is now commercially-produced, delivered, and controlled by a handful of giant media conglomerates seeking to minimize competition and maximize corporate profits rather than maximize competition and promote the public interest. According to the Supreme Court, the First Amendment protects the American public's right to "an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will prevail" and "suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral and other ideas and experiences." Moreover, it is "the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount."

But too often, our nation's policymakers favor media conglomerates' commercial interests over the public's Constitutional rights, placing America's democracy, culture, and economy at risk. Instead, guided by the principles that follow, policymakers must ensure that the Constitutional rights of present and future generations to freely express themselves in the media, and to access the free expression of others, using the technologies of today and tomorrow, are always "paramount."

We ask you to join the broad coalition of consumer, public interest, media reform, labor and other groups representing millions of Americans in proposing the following Bill of Citizens' Media Rights.

Media That Provide "An Uninhibited Marketplace of Ideas"

The American public has a right to:

- Journalism that fully informs the public, is independent of the government and acts as its watchdog, and protects journalists who dissent from their employers.
- Newspapers, television and radio stations, cable and satellite systems, and broadcast and cable networks operated by multiple, diverse, and independent owners that compete

vigorously and employ a diverse workforce.

- Radio and television programming produced by independent creators that is original, challenging, controversial, and diverse.
- Programming, stories, and speech produced by communities and citizens.
- Internet service provided by multiple, independent providers who compete vigorously and offer access to the entire Internet over a broadband connection, with freedom to attach within the home any device to the net connection and run any application.
- Public broadcasting insulated from political and commercial interests that is well-funded and especially serves communities underserved by privately-owned broadcasters.
- Regulatory policies emphasizing media education and citizen empowerment, not government censorship, as the best ways to avoid unwanted content.

Media That Use The Public's Airwaves To Serve The Public Interest

The American public has a right to:

- Electoral and civic, children's, educational, independently produced, local and community programming, as well as programming that serves Americans with disabilities and underserved communities.
- Media that reflect the presence and voices of people of color, women, labor, immigrants, Americans with disabilities, and other communities often underrepresented.
- Maximum access and opportunity to use the public airwaves and spectrum.
- Meaningful participation in government media policy, including disclosure of the ways broadcasters comply with their public interest obligations, ascertain their community's needs, and create programming to serve those needs.

Media That Reflect And Respond To Their Local Communities

The American public has a right to:

- Television and radio stations that are locally owned and operated, reflective of and responsible to the diverse communities they serve, and able to respond quickly to local emergencies.
- Well-funded local public access channels and community radio, including low-power FM radio stations.

- Universal, affordable Internet access for news, education, and government information, so that all citizens can better participate in our democracy and culture.
- Frequent, rigorous license and franchise renewal processes for local broadcasters and cable operators that meaningfully include the public.

Conclusion

These principles are not meant to be all-inclusive. Rather, they illustrate an American media structure that is the American public's present and future right under the Constitution of the United States.

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