



Consumer Federation of America

**Summary of Testimony of S. Derek Turner, Research Director, Free Press
Before The United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Regarding The Future of Radio October 24, 2007**

Free Press, Consumers Union, and Consumer Federation of America appreciate the opportunity to testify on the important communications policy issues surrounding the future of radio. As consumer advocates, we strongly support policies that will fulfill the goals of the Communications Act “to make available... to all the people of the United States, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex” a media that favors a “diversity of media voices”, characterized by “vigorous economic competition, technological advancement”, and one that serves “the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”¹ Ensuring a vibrant future for radio, as well as all other communications media, is vital to maintaining our economic and social well being in addition to our vigorous political discourse. Our democracy thrives on the dissemination of the widest possible sources of information, and radio remains one of the most important conduits for the propagation of local, national and international news, culture, entertainment and information.

The United States is a diverse melting pot of people and cultures. In such an environment it is not unreasonable to expect that the privilege of access to the scarce radio broadcast airwaves be distributed in a manner that reflects our racial, ethnic and gender diversity. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Women and people of color comprise 67 percent of our population, but own just 13 percent of our nation’s radio stations. This underrepresentation is a national disgrace and a true crisis for the millions of Americans who lack representative voices on the public airwaves. Compounding this tragedy is the simple fact that women and people of color are radio’s future. African American’s and Latinos spend 20 percent more of their time listening to radio than whites, over 22 hours each week. And while radio listenership has stagnated or declined among whites over the past decade, it has actually increased among people of color.

Though the Communications Act explicitly directs the Federal Communications Commission to disseminate “licenses among a wide variety of applicants, including... businesses owned by members of minority groups and women”², **our research reveals that the FCC lacks even the most basic understanding of the current state of female and minority ownership**, and therefore has no basis to assess the impacts of its broadcast regulatory policies on these underrepresented owners.

Our study, *Off The Dial* (attached to this testimony as an appendix), is to date the only comprehensive assessment of the state of female and minority radio ownership and the impacts of FCC regulatory policy. Using the Commission’s own data, we have done the work that the FCC has neglected to do.

The results of this study indicate a perilous state of under-representation of women and minorities in the ownership of broadcast media, where two-thirds of the U.S. population has very few stations representing their communities or serving their needs. The results also point to massive consolidation and market concentration as one of the key structural factors keeping women and minorities from accessing the public airwaves.

We hope that this study reminds policymakers at the FCC and in Congress that ownership rules that mitigate media market concentration and consolidation exist for a reason: to increase diversity and localism in ownership, which in turn produces more diverse speech, more choice for listeners, and more owners who are responsive to their local communities and serve the public interest.

¹ The Communications Act of 1934 (As Amended in 1996), Title I, Section 1; Title II, Section 257.

² The Communications Act of 1934 (As Amended in 1996), Title II, Section 309(j).