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Testimony
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I am honored to be here to discuss the critical issue of media ownership. But sadly, millions of concerned Americans will never have a seat at this table.

For too long, media policies have been made behind closed doors. This broken, corrupt process has meant that too few, own too much, at the expense of too many.

It's time to democratize our public airwaves. And we need to democratize the way the FCC does business.

It's not enough to give people a chance to speak. The FCC needs to listen, and do something to address their concerns. The FCC should be serving people, not profit.

If the FCC listened to the public it would be focused on improving media diversity -- not rushing toward consolidation.

Media diversity could not be more important. Media is a life or death issue for communities of color across the country. Representation is directly tied to ownership. Look no further than the Jena 6 to see the results.

We are gravely concerned that people of color own just 7 percent of the broadcast stations in this country.

This is a disgraceful level of inequality in one of the most important arenas of our economy and our democracy.

In the city of Washington, people of color make up 72 percent of the population -- but not a single television station in Washington D.C. is minority owned.

If we want more diversity -- consolidation is not the answer. Consolidation is the polar opposite of diversity. You can't have both.

Fewer owners mean fewer opportunities.

When a giant company is able to purchase stations across the country, people of color -- already victims to a long history of discriminatory business lending practices -- are pushed off the dial and out of the picture. That is unacceptable. And yet our government has turned a blind eye for decades.

We have a media diversity crisis -- and it's still not clear that the FCC is serious about addressing it.

The FCC's own research lacked the basic understanding of which stations are actually owned by minorities. Now the FCC is trying to rush through its minority media ownership review, not giving this critical issue the attention it deserves.

Stopping media consolidation is the most important way to help minority ownership.

The idea that the FCC would permit further media consolidation without first addressing the issue of minority ownership is preposterous and offensive to the communities that have been too long excluded.

The consequences of continuing to neglect the minority media ownership crisis are grave.

Ownership and publishers choose editors and writers; they choose priorities and ultimately it bleeds into content. The mainstream media's failure to cover such critical social and civil rights issues reflects the lack of diversity, sensitivity and commitment to the issues that affect minority communities.

Until we have equal access to the public airwaves, the media will continue to portray our youth as criminals and gangsters, play sexist music that disrespects women, ignore the crimes against our children, and shut us out of the public debate.

The FCC has a mandate to foster diversity, localism and competition over the public airwaves. Rolling back media consolidation serves all of these goals.

More diversity is good for local communities.

Minority owners are more likely to live and work in the communities they serve. They are more likely to work to reflect the values of our communities and to serve the public interest as well as the profit motive.

There are many policies the FCC and Congress should enact to promote minority ownership – including the tax credit I have advocated.

But unless you stop consolidation, none of them will have an opportunity to take root and bear fruit.

We need the independent, bipartisan minority ownership task force that Commissioner Adelstein has proposed, and we need to give this task force the time it needs to study the problem.

It is time the FCC listened to the people and rejected media consolidation. It is time the FCC opened the door to new owners—minorities and women. It is time the FCC worked to make sure that the American media represents the American people.

These are our airwaves. We gave them to Big Media, and we can take them back.

Thank you.

The Rainbow PUSH Coalition is a progressive organization, which seeks to protect, defend and gain civil rights, even the economic and educational playing fields in all aspects of American life and bring peace to the world. The organization is headquartered at 930 E. 50th St. in Chicago. For more information about the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, please visit the organization's website, www.rainbowpush.org, or telephone (202) 393-7874. To interview Rev. Jackson on this topic, please call the numbers listed above.