

FCC Statement

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Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you concerning the  
Information Needs of Communities.

Your report raises many important concerns that Americans  
need to be aware of. While anecdotally, the public has noticed  
that their daily newspaper has become lighter or that the local  
news seems be much more filled with fluff, this report breaks

down the potential long-term damage to our communities if the trends away from accountability journalism continue. For every news company such as The Washington Post, the New York Times and the Arizona Republic doing accountability journalism, there are dozens more news companies that can no longer muster the forces to keep careful watch over school boards, planning offices, city halls and police and sheriff offices the way they once did.

Contained in the report are several recommendations that the federal government should take to heart. As the Executive Director of the Digital Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab here at the Cronkite School of Journalism, I want to direct my comments to two of the recommendations.

I applaud the suggestion that the Federal government make as much data as possible available to the public so digital media

producers and programmers can more easily parse that information and distribute it to the public so that it is useful and relevant. So much relevant information is locked up in PDFs and scanned images that it makes it harder for programmers to sort that information. Additionally, we would very much like to see a single data standard for use by agencies within the Federal Government but also if the Federal Government could make that standard available to states and municipalities and provide incentives for local governments to use that standard. For example, we have a situation here in Maricopa County where the sheriff has complied with the letter of the law in releasing campaign finance data but not the spirit of the law by using scanned images. Reporters have to then manually re-enter data from thousands of pages of financial documents, which can be prohibitive to news organizations with limited resources.

## **Media Diversity**

My other comment is in the area of diversity in media. I'm not going to get into broadband or spectrum licensing, but I would push the FCC to keep careful watch over diversity hiring in digital media. We are seeing, unfortunately, that new and mainstream digital media companies are not paying as much attention to diversity as legacy media once did. Layoffs have hit reporters and editors who are of color especially hard. A recent report by the Maynard Institute found too that portrayals of minorities on the homepages of online publications are too infrequent. As digital media develops, we need to ensure that all people are represented on homepages and in the newsrooms.

Lastly, the report did not seem to specifically look at the state of ethnic newspapers in the United States. Sadly, publications such as The Chicago Defender, the Michigan Chronicle and

African American newspapers are struggling and near failure.

As we look at remedies to support news media, let's also remember the important role played by these media companies in covering diverse communities.

Thank you very much.