WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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2006 QUADRENNIAL REGULATORY REVIEW – REVIEW OF THE COMMISSION'S BROADCAST OWNERSHIP RULES AND OTHER RULES ADOPTED PURSUANT TO SECTION 202 OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996

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As the Federal Communications Commission considers changing existing media ownership rules, it should not proceed without considering, first and foremost, how children will be affected. Both Congress and the FCC have affirmed that children constitute a unique audience that merits special consideration and protection. Thus, the Commission has an obligation to evaluate the consequences its decisions will have on the child audience.

Television is an extraordinarily powerful and ubiquitous medium for the nation's children. On average, children watch almost three hours of television per day; more than two thirds of kids (68%) have a television in their bedroom.[1] Virtually all children watch television before their first exposure to formal education. By the time children graduate from high school, they will have spent more time in front of the television than in the classroom.[2] We know how important school is for kids. This reminds us that television can be important for children, especially when we consider the role of educational/informational programming which has been found to positively influence a child's readiness to start school and do well.[3]

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[1] Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).

[2] Strasburger VC, *Children, Adolescents, and Television*. Pediatr Rev, 1992; 13: 144-151.

[3] See Nicholas Zill et al., "Viewing of Sesame Street by Preschool Children in the United States and Its Relationship to School Readiness," Report prepared for Children's Television Workshop by Westsat, Inc., Rockville, MD, 1994; John Wright, Aletha Huston, "*Effects of Educational TV Viewing in Lower Income Preschoolers on Academic Skills, School Readiness, and School Adjustment One to Three Years Later: A Report to Children's Television Workshop*," 1995.; Deborah Linebarger, "*Summative Evluation of Bewteen the Lions: A Final Report to WGBH Educational Foundation*," (Kansas City, KS: Juniper Gardens Children's Project, University of Kansas, 2000).

Eighteen percent of the nation's children rely solely on broadcast television and do not have access to cable or satellite television.[4] Thus, while some argue that children's cable channels provide a plethora of diversity, this programming is not available to almost one out of five children in this country.

Children Now has been concerned about the impact of media consolidation on children's programming since 2003 when the Federal Communications Commission announced its plans to modify existing media ownership rules. In order to inform the FCC's rulemaking, Children Now conducted *Big Media, Little Kids*, the first study ever to examine the link between media consolidation and children's programming.

Children Now selected Los Angeles as a case study for this research because it is the second largest media market in the country and two duopolies existed among its television stations in 2003. *Big Media, Little Kids* compared the children's programming schedules from 1998, when the market's seven major commercial broadcast stations were owned by seven different companies, to 2003, after consolidation reduced the number to five. The findings were striking, suggesting that changes to ownership policies that allow greater consolidation would have a serious negative impact on the availability and diversity of children's programming.

Here's what we found:

- The number of children's series broadcast in Los Angeles decreased by nearly half from 1998 to 2003.
- Most of the decline in the number of children's series in Los Angeles occurred on three of the four stations that are part of media duopolies.
- From 1998 to 2003, the number of hours each week devoted to children's programming in Los Angeles decreased by more than 50%.
- The largest decreases in these programming hours were on stations that are part of media duopolies.

[4] Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).

- In 2003, children's programs were almost four times more likely to be repurposed, or aired on more than one channel or network, than they were in 1998.
- Most repurposing occurred between outlets that were owned by the same media companies.

The results of our 2003 research study are clear. Large media conglomerates in the Los Angeles market did not serve children nearly as well as individually-owned stations. When the FCC allowed greater media convergence, this led to large media companies broadcasting fewer children's series over fewer hours and repurposing of programs from their cable properties. The greatest decreases in children's programs occurred on duopoly stations. The results of our study leave little doubt that media consolidation diminishes the availability and diversity of programs for children.

It is important to note that this study examined only the *early* stages of media consolidation on the quantity of program offerings for children. What will happen to children's programming in the future if the Commission relaxes or eliminates existing rules? In order to inform the FCC's rulemaking, Children Now is currently updating and expanding our study to include eight broadcast markets across the country. We plan to release the study before the end of 2006.

Children Now is also concerned that media consolidation will lead to fewer decision-makers in the entertainment industry who, due to financial pressures, will be more likely to replicate existing programs, and will be even less willing to be innovative or invest in new types of children's programming. Children under 18 years of age comprise 25% of the nation's population.[5] Because of the relatively small size of the

[5] Calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau National Population Estimates July 1, 2005 data from "*Annual Estimates of the Population by Selected Age Groups and Sex for the United States*," accessed at http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrch/NC-EST2005-sa.html on September 30, 2006.

child audience, they are by definition a minority audience. Given this, it should not be surprising that broadcasters have historically catered more programming to adults than children. Children Now is concerned that with increased media consolidation broadcasters will not provide enriching programming to children as well as they seem to do for adults.

Finally, what about local programming for children? Research shows that locally-produced educational programming enhances the civic engagement of children by teaching them about their diverse communities and offering perspectives on local issues. Yet consolidation also has had an adverse impact on local educational programming for children. In 1997, the Annenberg Public Policy Center forecast that as the networks increasingly provided inexpensive E/I programming, locally-produced programming would diminish or be squeezed out of viable time slots. A subsequent study by Annenberg demonstrated the truth of its earlier prediction. In a 1999 survey of approximately 1,200 commercial broadcasters reporting on their educational/informational or E/I programming, the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 65 E/I shows were locally-produced.[6] Many of these locally-produced programs disappeared as networks began offering three-hour blocks of programming. Today, locally-produced programming for children is virtually non-existent.

In summary, children rely on broadcast media to provide them with diverse programming that enriches, educates and entertains and we recognize that television can be a tremendous benefit to the child audience. However, our data shows that when greater

[6] Amy Jordan, Ph.D., "The Three-Hour Rule: Insiders' Reactions," Report Series No. 29, The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, 1999.

media consolidation is allowed, the child audience suffers. Nearly one in five children rely solely on broadcast television for their access to children's educational/informational programming. Large media conglomerates that own multiple stations in the Los Angeles market broadcast fewer children's series over fewer hours. If you share our view that children need to be a priority, then this is not an acceptable way to serve the child audience.

In its current review of media ownership rules, we ask the Federal Communications Commission to serve the needs of children by considering the following:

1) Maintain the existing media ownership rules and do not allow for further media consolidation to occur.

2) Modify the local television multiple ownership rule by abandoning a voice test and returning to the previous rule where each broadcaster would be limited to a single license per market. We believe limiting broadcasters to one license will ensure more diversity in the marketplace as stations owned by different companies will not share their children's shows, thereby providing unique programming on these stations in a given market.

3) We ask that any relaxation of the rules be accompanied by a requirement that the Commission analyze, according to specific guidelines, the impact of any proposed media mergers on children served by the market.

We need the FCC to serve the needs of children and ensure that broadcasters are providing a diverse media environment worthy of our nation's children.

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