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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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Mr. William Kennard
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
1919 "M" Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Kennard:

"A people that wants to be free must arm itself with a free press. "

This quote by George Seldes, the legendary journalist and tireless defender of press freedom, is more relevant today than when he wrote it years ago.

Freedom of the press is under attack in the United States. Ten media corporations now control most of what Americans see, hear and read. Diversity in perspective is narrowing in the news business, and the scope of discussion of current events has been severely circumscribed. Democracy requires an involved public, and when that public is uninformed or misinformed, or when the views that it hears are skewed too far to the right, then democracy cannot thrive.

When cities and counties have only one newspaper, and their broadcast sources are homogenized, not only is the information they receive restricted, they risk losing their voices as well. Low-power FM broadcasting (micro-power radio) could play a role in keeping the people in these communities informed and involved, but, micro-power radio is presently illegal.

I understand, however, that the Federal Communications Commission is considering changing its rules to legalize economical low-power FM broadcasting. I and members of the Social Justice Center of Marin County, California are fully supportive of this action.

As we try to reach out to our fellow citizens in Marin County on issues as important as emergency services, children's safety and education of its citizens, our ability to communicate is limited by the fact that we have virtually no broadcast media with significant locally oriented public affairs programming.

Given the massive consolidation of media ownership, we strongly feel that locally owned non-commercial community-based low power radio is an important goal for our community, and we would urge your Commission to legalize it as soon as possible.

In addition, the Y2K problem is of concern. At the millennium, there may be chaos. The normal means of communication may not be operable and citizens may be without vital information that could save lives and reduce community disruption. Micro-power radio could literally be a life-saver.

The FCC should take advantage of this potential crisis to legalize and allow to be put in place in communities all over the country this communication method. If a community's electricity grid goes down, since micro-power radio it is not dependent on the grid, and can continue to be effective by being run from car batteries or solar panels.

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Such stations would be an indispensable means of providing information and keeping communities informed and organized. Low-power radio on a non-commercial basis should be authorized now, so that such stations will be in place, and people will know how to run them and where to listen for them on the FM dial, should a crisis occur in their community, now or on January 1, 2000.

We appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,



Stephen Fein
Social Justice Center of Marin County

cc: Commissioners
Susan Ness
Harold Furchgott-Roth
Michael Powell
Gloria Tristani

Congresswoman Lynn ~~Woolsey~~
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Barbara Feinstein