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March 26, 1999

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The Honorable William Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter is to express my deep concerns about the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that the FCC has begun on the issue of low-power FM, also known as microradio.

One of the major tasks that the FCC is charged with is to ensure that our broadcast and other services are maintained in as interference-free an environment as possible. But in reviewing this issue, it is clear to me that the Commission is giving serious consideration to forsaking its interest in protecting against interference by looking to add these new low-power stations.

In the rulemaking itself, the Commission explains the situation in stark reality. Unless second and third channel interference protections are reduced, there can be no low-power FM stations added in most markets. The only way those stations can come on stream is to reduce the protections against interference that make the FM band listenable. I see no public policy benefit from such an action.

Moreover, I do not see any forethought in this notice regarding the planned transition to digital audio broadcasting. Local stations will hopefully soon be adding a digital signal on top of their analog signals within the same band and channel. This service promises greatly improved clarity and service to the public. Yet the addition of micro or low-power stations has the potential to seriously impair the ability of the digital signals to reach listeners unimpeded by interference.

I also do not understand how the proposed ownership limits for low-power stations, or the Commission's desire to license certain favored group, can be reconciled with the Telecommunications Act of 1996 or the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

In my opinion this rulemaking is far in advance of the science and research needed to demonstrate that it is both technically feasible as well as good public policy. While I understand the interest many may have in becoming broadcasters, it is my understanding that there are still AM and FM licenses available for application. Indeed, some of those applications are pending even as the Commission prepares to push ahead low-power FM.

I cautiously urge you and the Commission to give serious consideration to placing any low-power FM actions on hold until and unless these technical issues are resolved and

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rules are adopted for digital audio broadcasting. American listeners depend on local broadcasters for important local news, weather and emergency bulletins, public affairs and other programming. We should not be putting access to that programming at risk by bringing on-line a new, untested and technically infeasible radio service that seems driven less by good public policy and more by an interest in placating pirate radio operators.

Thank you for your considerations of these views.

Sincerely,

Joe Mullins
President and General Manager