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American Library Association

January 24, 2001

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Magalie Roman Salas
Secretary, FCC
455 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

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Re: Ultra-Wideband (ET Docket 98-153)

Dear Ms. Salas,

I am writing on behalf of the American Library Association (ALA) in response to the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on ultra-wideband radio. ALA believes that high-speed wireless Local Area Networking (LAN) technology could have important, potential benefit to libraries. It promises to allow for fast and flexible internal networking of buildings at relatively low costs and, thus improve the ability of libraries to provide high-speed Internet access to students, and scholars, and the general public.

ALA is a nonprofit educational organization of 61,000 librarians, library educators, information specialists, library trustees, and friends of libraries representing public, school, academic, state, and specialized libraries dedicated to the improvement of library and information services.

ALA has repeatedly worked to ensure that advanced technology, information services, and library services are available to all Americans, regardless of race, income, or geographical location. Beyond access issues, ALA is also committed to making technology *work* for the public. Helped by the E-rate and other Federal, state and local initiatives, libraries have become leaders in providing public access to the Internet and the information resources and services that reside on it. They provide Internet literacy training programs and navigation tools to help users negotiate the wealth of information available on the World Wide Web.

Americans of all ages, races, and ethnic groups come to libraries across the country to take advantage of these services. Although roughly half of all Americans do not have access to the Internet from home, 95 percent of American's public libraries do offer free Internet access to the public. In fact, surveys regularly show that libraries are among the most common Internet access points outside work, home and school. America's public

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libraries are on the forefront of serving as a bridge across the digital divide, and hope to continue to do so.

Unfortunately, many libraries have been limited in their ability to provide an adequate level of service because of antiquated infrastructure within some library and school buildings and due to the difficulty and expense of installing wired high-speed LAN technology. In these buildings, traditional wired networking is either impossible, extremely expensive, or may pose health risks from asbestos and other factors. Thus, even with the benefits of the E-rate, many libraries are unable to afford the high costs of local area networking. In these situations, a wireless local area networking alternative like UWB could be both cost-effective and easy to install and operate.

Because of the potential of UWB to offer low-cost LANs and to provide better public access to the full range of Internet services, we urge the FCC to encourage the development and availability of this technology as quickly as possible.

We understand that there is a concern that in some portions of the spectrum, certain applications of UWB technologies could potentially interfere with certain public safety signals, such as those used in navigation. We urge the FCC to move forward judiciously in dealing with those applications. However, it is apparent from the record already established in this rule-making that there are applications which operate above 2 GHz—in particular LAN technologies—that do not interfere with existing wireless applications. In these cases, we strongly urge the Commission to move forward in licensing and certifying these products, thus providing an alternative LAN technology to schools and libraries throughout the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on ultra-wideband and the potential positive impact its deployment would have on our nation's libraries.

Sincerely,



Emily Sheketoff
Executive Director, Washington Office
American Library Association