



February 25, 2020

Rep. Derek Davis
Rep. Kathleen Dumias
Maryland House of Delegates
Economic Matters Committee
Re: Hearing on HB0957

Dear Chair and Vice Chair of the Maryland House of Delegates Committee on Economic Matters:

The National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) submits the following written statement from Brenda Victoria Castillo, President & CEO.

Nearly a decade ago, NHMC created a D.C. Policy Team to address digital inequities facing the Latinx community—primarily net neutrality issues. Since then, NHMC has led the fight against the telecommunications industry for strong, enforceable net neutrality regulations and legislation. Notably, NHMC has testified before the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee and spoke across the country about the importance of net neutrality to the future prosperity of the Latinx community.

NHMC has also defended net neutrality in the Courts, as a litigant in the recent *Mozilla v. FCC* case in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.¹ As the only litigant who represents the Latinx community, NHMC with the help of formidable counsel from Spiegel and McDiarmid, gave a voice to the millions of Latinos currently left unprotected from Internet Service Providers' (ISP) discriminatory practices. NHMC's unique relationships with the civil rights community, the government, and the tech industry position it well to advocate for the expansion and protection of the digital rights for the Latinx community.

For Latinos, net neutrality related harms are another form of industry discrimination that disproportionately affects our community. It is essential to acknowledge the systemic harms that are compounded by the current state of net neutrality repeals. The Latinx Digital Divide stands between nearly a third of Latinx families and the life that a reliable connection to the internet at home offers.² When our community does not have access to the internet, it creates a domino

¹ *Mozilla Corp. v. Fed. Commc'ns Comm'n*, No. 18-051 (D.C. Cir. Oct. 1, 2019).

² Anna Brown, et. al, *Broadband subscriptions among Latinos little changed since 2010*, Pew Research Center (July 20, 2016),

<https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/07/20/2-broadband-subscriptions-among-latinos-little-changed-since-2010/>.

effect: the homework gap³ leads to the achievement gap,⁴ which leads to the wage gap⁵ and so on.

Allowing ISPs unchecked power to be gatekeepers to prioritize content and the quality of tiers of internet experience, undermines any efforts to close the Latinx Digital Divide. The value of connecting to the internet is tarnished by the ISP's power to censor content, speeds, and experiences at any time. With the existing Latinx Digital Divide, the system of internet access posed by a net neutrality-less world will inherently leave Latinos even less connected than we are today. Access to the internet is too valuable and central to everyday survival to allow industry power to create a two-tiered system; the future "have-nots" of the internet will be limited or cut off entirely from economic and social opportunities online.

Latino-owned businesses are increasingly driving the U.S. economy, many of which live and conduct business online. Revenue from Latino-owned companies jumped 46.5 percent from 2018 to 2019, bringing in \$479,413 on average.⁶ This kind of entrepreneurship is expected to continue to grow as the Latinx population increases, becoming an estimated 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050.⁷ Without strong, enforceable net neutrality laws, Latinos who run businesses online and who are less likely to have access to deep pockets of capital⁸ face barriers to innovation by way of higher prices and tiers of service set by ISPs.

The age of the internet has opened up a level playing field in Hollywood storytelling. For more than thirty years, NHMC has fought for the representation of Latinos in front of and behind the camera in the Hollywood industry. Innovative online content has lowered barriers to the representation of Latinx art, actors, and stories. Nonetheless, opportunities for authentic storytelling by people of color are available only if ISPs are prohibited from censoring and blocking practices that are not only discriminatory but also lack transparency.

NHMC openly supports any net neutrality legislation, regulations, and policies that are enforceable, strong, and that valiantly protect the Latinx community from discrimination. Thus, NHMC supports House Bill 0957 *as amended*.

³ Homework Gap, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homework_gap.

⁴ Achievement Gap, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achievement_gaps_in_the_United_States.

⁵ Racial Wage Gap in the United States, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_wage_gap_in_the_United_States.

⁶ Rohit Arora, *Earnings of Latino Owned Businesses Increased 46% in the Past 12 Months*, Forbes (Oct. 14, 2019),

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rohitarora/2019/10/14/earnings-of-latino-owned-businesses-jumped-46-in-past-12-months/#1a74c1ecd05b>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Nicole Acevedo, *More Latinos Own Businesses, but Can't Get Capital to Grow*, Report Says, NBC News (Nov. 13, 2018),

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/more-latinos-own-businesses-can-t-get-capital-grow-report-n935966>.



Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Brenda V. Castillo', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Brenda V. Castillo
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National Hispanic Media Coalition
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