

Mr. Thomas Wheeler
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street NW
Washington, D.C 20554

March 10, 2014

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

I was pleased to read that you oppose further consolidation in the broadcast industry and made it clear you would like to cut back on the so-called “shared services” agreements or “SSA’s,” which allow a station owned by one company to provide news for a competing company in the same market.

In your statement you said, “...motivated by evidence that our rules protecting competition, diversity and localism have been circumvented, we will consider some changes to other Commission Rules to enforce existing rules.”

I could not agree more. Many of the stations that are now part of a shared service agreement had working news departments with journalists who covered local news. Those news departments were closed for various reasons, disrupting the lives and careers of the affected journalists.

I have personally talked to four of these journalists since your announcement was released on March 6. In some cases they were hired by the new station or were forced to move for a new opportunity. Sometimes they remained unemployed for a length of time or left the media industry altogether.

There are many more people who have been affected by these newsroom “mergers” but cannot talk about it publicly because they could get in trouble, especially if they currently work in the industry.

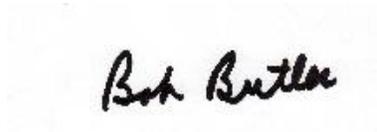
When there are fewer newsrooms, there are fewer opportunities for all journalists to find work. Viewers of the different stations get the same news delivered by the same people, limiting the opportunity to hear different

viewpoints. For those who work in these newly “shared” newsrooms, there is more work and less time for in-depth or investigative reporting.

There are also fewer management jobs, leading to less diversity among those who make decisions on news coverage and hiring.

Research shows that the demographic representation of newsroom management significantly trails that of the country. The National Association of Black Journalists Association 2012 Television Newsroom Management Diversity census found that, while people of color represented approximately 35% of the nation’s population, the diversity for television station newsroom managers was 12%.

You have indicated you do not want to completely eliminate the practice of Shared Services Agreements. I think that is appropriate because there may be limited cases where these agreements make sense. But, given the number of journalists who have been displaced by them, I’m glad to see the FCC take a closer look at how the SSA’s are being used.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Butler". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bob Butler
President
National Association of Black Journalists