

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Lifting Voices: Legislation to Promote Media Marketplace Diversity”
January 15, 2020

It is timely that we are holding this hearing today to discuss the lack of ownership and employment diversity in the media marketplace. Earlier this week, there was a lot of criticism about the Academy Award nominations for a lack of diversity in the acting and directing categories. This same criticism holds true with media ownership. I do not think anyone can dispute that ownership of our media does not reflect the diversity of our country.

The numbers are clear – and alarming. While women and people of color make up over fifty percent of our population, broadcast ownership by them hovers around ten percent. We must do better.

Representation matters because the people behind the scenes influence the programming that we see and hear. And that programming plays a critical role in our democratic process and influencing people’s perspectives.

In the early days of broadcasting, it was virtually impossible for women and people of color to own media outlets. Today, the opportunities are not impossible but are still very limited. Women and people of color can still face discrimination when it comes to accessing capital, and, as a result, we are far more likely to see consolidation than diversity when an outlet is sold.

While I would hope large media companies would reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, women and people of color are, unfortunately, underrepresented in their executive suites. We also do not have any data to better understand employment demographic trends because the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has failed to collect that data for nearly 20 years. This is extremely unfortunate – diverse employment is just as critical as diverse ownership. It’s the executives and producers who influence programming decisions, which news stories to cover, and importantly, how to cover a story.

I am pleased that we are here today – with bipartisan efforts – to improve diversity in the media marketplace.

Representative Butterfield’s bill would reinstate the successful tax certificate program. Representative Clarke’s bill ensures that the FCC’s data is analyzed and not simply reported. And legislation from Representatives Long and Veasey requires the FCC to examine market entry barriers for women and people of color.

I commend these members for their leadership. It is imperative that Congress, the FCC, and all interested stakeholders work together to help bring more diversity to our nation’s media ownership.