

April 5, 2011

Dear Senator:

The Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide (MAADD) is a 100,000+ member next generation civil rights organization devoted to bridging the digital divide and promoting personal and economic development in low income and minority communities across the county. Our recently launched Florida Chapter is rapidly growing with people who are passionate about the need to promote technology as a means to transform the economic, social, political and cultural landscapes in Florida's low income and minority communities. MAADD Florida is already busy at work creating a statewide, 10,000+ member grassroots infrastructure so that low income and minority communities can participate in social activism on a massive scale.

We are writing today because we see a crisis in our communities. As you know, in Florida and across the country, many people are suffering as a result of high unemployment due to the downturn of the economy. However, this suffering is exponential in Florida's minority communities. In fact, while we hear about the unemployment rate decreasing generally, the reverse is true in African-American communities nationally, including those in Florida where unemployment remains in the double digits.

However, this crisis can be partially thwarted by passing legislation that will promote investment in broadband technologies. By passing House Bill 1231 and its companion bill Senate Bill 1524, Florida can stimulate increased broadband investment that will create unlimited potential for our communities. With state of the art broadband investment the opportunities are endless. It can allow underserved neighborhoods to promote economic development through the establishment of minority small businesses that hire locally. It can provide Florida citizens with better access to healthcare, education, and jobs. And it can give the voiceless a voice in the political process so that they can have an impact on issues that affect their everyday lives.

Most importantly, telecom reform is the essential first step to job creation. According to a study by the Brookings Institute, for every one percentage point increase in broadband penetration, 300,000 non-farm jobs are created throughout the entire economy. This legislation puts the state's priorities in order as it eliminates resources spent on managing outdated regulations and allows those resources to be used to create jobs and increase broadband investment – especially investment in wireless broadband which is the key to bridging the Digital Divide.

We understand that opponents to this legislation are concerned that HB 1231/SB 1524 may allow phone companies to raise rates on landline phone services. However, the reality is that with the plethora of options available to consumers today, even the most vulnerable consumers are not held hostage to landline phones anymore. We believe that any potential rate hike or degradation of service would only cause consumers to drop their landline phone service even faster. In fact, in low income and minority communities we are already seeing a mass exodus from landline phone service where consumers are communicating solely via wireless phones.

And seniors are no exception. We have found within our church communities that most seniors already have cell phones and even AARP provides cell phone service to seniors for as low as \$10 per month. So the issue isn't that seniors are adverse to technology, the issue is that our seniors need to be better educated on the numerous service offerings that are available to them. MAADD would be happy to partner with any organization to distribute consumer education information through our ministerial networks to the people that need it most. But we do not believe that the benefits of this legislation should be held up over issues that we can solve by other means.

With so many Florida citizens struggling today, this legislation could be a real turning point that provides the opportunity for people to better their lives. For this reason, we ask that you support us in this effort and vote YES on HB 1231/SB1524.

Please contact us at 866-297-0164 if you have any questions or concerns.

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