



Officers

Chair

Judith L. Lichtman
National Partnership for
Women & Families

Vice Chairs

Margaret Huang
Southern Poverty Law Center
Derrick Johnson
NAACP

Thomas A. Saenz
Mexican American Legal
Defense and Educational Fund
Secretary

Fatima Goss Graves
National Women's Law Center

Treasurer

Lee A. Saunders
American Federation of State,
County and Municipal Employees

Board of Directors

Abed Ayoub
American-Arab
Anti-Discrimination Committee
Gloria L. Blackwell
AAUW
Shawn Fain
International Union, UAW
Jocelyn Frye
National Partnership for
Women & Families
Jonathan Greenblatt
Anti-Defamation League
Damon Hewitt
Lawyers' Committee for
Civil Rights Under Law
David H. Inoue
Japanese American Citizens League
Marc Morial
National Urban League
Janet Murgula
UnidosUS
Svante Myrick
People For the American Way
Janai Nelson
NAACP Legal Defense and
Educational Fund, Inc.
Christian F. Nunes
National Organization for Women
Rabbi Jonah Pesner
Religious Action Center
of Reform Judaism
Rebecca Pringle
National Education Association
Lisa Rice
National Fair Housing Alliance
Kelley Robinson
Human Rights Campaign
Anthony Romero
American Civil Liberties Union
Liz Shuler
AFL-CIO
Celina Stewart
League of Women Voters of
the United States
Maria Town
American Association of
People with Disabilities
April Verrett
Service Employees International Union
Randi Weingarten
American Federation of Teachers
Larry Wright, Jr.
National Congress of American Indians
John C. Yang
Asian Americans Advancing Justice |
AAJC

President and CEO

Maya Wiley

February 10, 2025

Media/Telecommunications Task Force Legislative Priorities for the 119th Congress

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and its Media/Telecommunications Task Force, we write to share our legislative priorities for the 119th Congress.

The Media/Telecommunications Task Force focuses its efforts on making sure that civil and human rights, equal opportunity, and democratic participation are front and center in communications and technology policy. The task force works to ensure that all people in the United States have affordable access to advanced communications technology and full participation, fair representation, and accountability in electronic and traditional news media.

Core government institutions like Congress, our judicial system, and the technologies that enable them, remain the bedrock of a democracy. As technology use in those core institutions becomes more ubiquitous, the way technology is used becomes more critical. Our media, technology, and telecommunications systems must be accountable to the communities they serve, and work equitably and fairly for all.

Millions of households still do not have affordable, fast, reliable internet, or the devices and skills needed to use it. Without this access, we will live in a society that perpetuates disparities in data-driven technology and systems that rely on technology. Digital exclusion, through digital redlining and unaffordable broadband prices, also threatens the United States' economic leadership by leaving qualified workers unable to participate in our increasingly digital economy. Communities without internet access and adoption risk falling behind in job opportunities, a critical gap that threatens our nation's competitive edge in the global market. They also miss out on crucial economic development opportunities, including benefits for small businesses, increased wages for residents, lower unemployment, and more. Closing the digital divide means giving all of our communities the digital tools they need to be vibrant and prosperous.

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and other data-driven technologies have drastically changed our society. AI must be used to advance—not undermine—civil rights and civil liberties. To create a transformative and sustainable nation of opportunity, a powerful set of

February 10, 2025
Page 2 of 4

common sense standards must govern emerging technologies. Elections, health care, housing, education, financial services, insurance, the workplace, online commerce, public benefits, government services, immigration, and the criminal-legal system all involve data-driven technologies that can either help or harm people, depending on how the government responds at this critical moment. Congress has an essential role to play in ensuring technology works for all of us. The American public should not have to rely on the whims of Big Tech to ensure that AI systems are safe and fair.

Privacy is a fundamental civil right that should protect each of us from governmental and private overreach and intrusion. Right now, “black box” algorithms and AI systems use our personal data on a daily basis to make decisions that impact our lives. These systems and data can mean the difference between accessing lifesaving health care, a vital small business loan, or financial aid to support a student while attending the college of their dreams. The reality is these systems can and do discriminate against people of color and other marginalized groups, limiting opportunities to essential goods and services. Moreover, when government agencies and companies are given unrestricted access to our personal information, they create opportunities to violate constitutional rights like the Fourth Amendment. Invasive commercial and government surveillance and algorithmic discrimination must be stopped.

Basic institutions of a democratic society such as a free press and diverse viewpoints are under attack. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chair Brendan Carr has reinstated complaints against major television networks for purportedly favoring Democratic candidates — a naked attempt to use the FCC’s broadcast authority to engage in unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination. Leaders on both sides of the aisle have long supported the FCC’s role as a neutral referee on media issues, and Congress should reinforce that tradition. Moreover, Congress has long charged the FCC with ensuring that all people, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex have equitable access to technology — a responsibility that Congress should urge the new chair to uphold.

The following priorities reflect areas where the task force believes urgent attention and action from Congress is needed to advance civil rights, fairness, and equity in media, telecommunications, and technology. Legislation in these areas should not, and cannot, be considered without engagement from the civil rights community.

We are eager to engage with you on the following issues during the 119th Congress:

- **Artificial Intelligence**

- Both the Senate and the House have issued detailed reports on AI that were developed after months of hearings. Both chambers acknowledged the risks to civil rights and civil liberties that come with the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence.
- We urge Congress to develop and pass legislation that addresses the harms found in the two reports through required third party audits, transparency requirements, and other research-tested methods for reducing bias in automated systems.

February 10, 2025
Page 3 of 4

- Civil rights must be explicitly protected in any AI legislation.
- Ensuring that technology works for all of us also means addressing and preventing discriminatory data practices, reducing algorithmic surveillance, and ending use cases that threaten civil liberties (including use by immigration officials and law enforcement) by limiting appropriations for new surveillance systems that will be used harmfully against our community.
- **Broadband Affordability**
 - We support access to high quality, affordable internet, which is essential to attaining good-paying jobs, quality health care, education opportunities, and so many more critical goods and services.
 - We support reinstatement of the Affordable Connectivity Program and any Universal Service Fund reform necessary to support ACP through the USF.
- **Data Privacy**
 - Processing of personal data should protect privacy and promote fairness, equity, and justice as it enhances safety, economic opportunity, and convenience for all.
 - We support legislation that creates real and lasting protections for the personal data of hundreds of millions of consumers in the United States. Privacy protections will significantly expand equal opportunity online through strong anti-discrimination provisions, algorithmic bias assessments, and heightened protections for data that reveal sensitive information about a person.
 - Civil rights must be explicitly protected in any privacy legislation, including an explicit prohibition on the use of personal data to discriminate based on protected characteristics.
- **Diverse Viewpoints in Media**
 - We support close Congressional oversight of the FCC's role as a viewpoint neutral steward of the nation's media and technology.

We appreciate your consideration and would welcome the opportunity to connect further on our legislative priorities. If you have any questions, please contact Jonathan Walter, senior policy counsel, The Leadership Conference's Center for Civil Rights and Technology at walter@civilrights.org, or the co-chairs of the Media/Telecommunications Task Force, Cheryl Leanza, United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry, at cleanza@alhmail.com or Claudia Ruiz, UnidosUS, at cruiz@unidosus.org.

February 10, 2025
Page 4 of 4

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
UnidosUS
United Church of Christ Media Justice Ministry