

May 28, 2006

Re: Hurricane Katrina Independent Panel

My name is Mikkel Allen, and after Hurricane Katrina, I worked in the Media Department of the American Red Cross in Alaska. A few weeks after the hurricane, Red Cross flew me to Louisiana to continue disaster relief work with evacuees living in the Red Cross shelter in Baton Rouge. I continued disaster relief and recovery efforts in New Orleans, and am working with grassroots groups to help communities there with the rebuilding efforts. I am writing to express to the panel, based on my experiences with disaster relief, the important role low power community radio could play as another outlet for emergency communications and recovery and relief work.

Broadcast radio has the potential to save lives in natural or man-made disaster. Through radio, citizens can receive and disseminate information delivering instruction, emergency preparation such as emergency medical care and first aid priorities, current weather conditions, contamination bulletins, available resources and utilities. It is also a point for organizing evacuation. We have seen with experience that there is a need to report and catalog disaster services for recovery that, in New Orleans, were not met. A community radio outlet would have facilitated getting critical information out to residents, both in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and also during rebuilding efforts. Recovery and rebuilding efforts suffered because such an outlet was not available to citizens in New Orleans. These things have not been provided nor is it prone to be provided by commercial/corporate radio. I hope that the panel will advise the FCC to enable low power community radio stations in New Orleans. The third adjacent channel restrictions currently in place on low power FM radio (LPFM) mean that New Orleans has no access to this critical communications resource in emergency situations.

Low Power radio could enable three major solutions after a disaster:

**\*Community Radio in Recovery**

A locally-based community station in New Orleans could have provided curfew coverage and broadcast vital phone numbers of FEMA, the Red Cross, and the City. The misinformation and rumors circulating after the hurricane could have been dispelled with local coverage. Potential funded development programs for Community Radio in a disaster include First Responder Certification and training in Resourceful Technology. Equipment stationed in hubs could go into effect by dedicated and trained citizens.

**\*Community Radio in Relief**

In the months after the storm, there was no local outlet to disseminate information on thriving grassroots organizations and services, e.g. soup kitchens, water drop-offs, free clinics with prescriptions, transportation via

bike, police activity reports, free legal services, weather and pollution bulletins, and shelter information among other community services.

#### \*Community Radio in Rebuilding

Community Radio brings an incredible networking tool to and for the city and its residents due to its low cost and accessibility. Low power community stations can be set up quickly and inexpensively, and present a powerful tool for rebuilding communities. In the months after the storm when residents were returning home to rebuild, there was no community-based outlet to report on local news, events, and no forum to address the important community issues arising after the hurricane. Community Radio shapes around its supporting community and various demographic issues, and is able to respond to local needs.

I hope that the Commission will act to expand LPFM, and support low power radio emergency operations in preparation for, during, and after disasters. Low power radio presents a model for emergency communications operation that connects emergency officials and relief groups with disaster victims, providing essential information and rebuilding tools.