August 28, 2017
Attn: Chairman Ajit V. Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to you today as the leaders of the Latino Victory Project, Emgage, AAPI Victory Fund, and Color Of Change who have concerns about the harmful impacts of the proposed Sinclair-Tribune merger on programming diversity and choice and the health of American democracy. For the reasons set forth below, the Commission should deny the transaction.

While Sinclair has yet to explain how this merger is in the public interest, it is clear this deal will undermine media diversity and consumer choice. Diverse media networks, and the programming they produce, are critical to how we access and digest news. Consumers should have a choice – from a wide array of options – on how they acquire information on a variety of topics and issues. This massive consolidation will distort balanced media coverage in potentially negative ways and yield particularly harmful consequences in diverse communities like ours.

It is no secret Sinclair Broadcast Group currently requires its 173 local affiliates to carry national “must run” stories that substitute the judgement of local newscasters and coverage of local issues in favor of national stories produced by Sinclair. These “must run” segments typically have a pro-Trump slant and have included, for example, Sinclair’s vice president for news accusing the national news media of publishing “fake news stories,” as well as regular must-run commentary from former Trump Administration official Boris Epshteyn that one critic described as being “as close to classic propaganda as anything I have seen in broadcast television in the last 30 years.”

Additionally, must-run stories produced by Sinclair have regularly included racist and Islamophobic content that echoes the rhetoric used by white supremacists. One mandatory daily segment, “Terrorism Alert Desk,” has repeatedly targeted Muslim-Americans and conflated Islam with terror. At a time when civil rights advocacy organizations are reporting a rise in hate crimes, particularly those against Muslims, Sinclair is fanning the flames of racial and religious animus that put our communities in danger.

This practice would greatly expand under the proposed transaction. If the merger is approved, Sinclair would reach 72% of U.S. households; operate 233 local broadcast stations (which is 80 more than its nearest potential competitor); and broadcast in 106 local markets,
including adding key markets like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Dallas, where it has no presence today. With a disproportionate amount of market control and the ability to forcefeed local stations content, Sinclair could very well strip diverse communities of independent local coverage on the issues of greatest concern to them, such as immigration and civil rights issues.

In light of these substantial public interest harms, the Commission should deny the merger.

Sincerely,

Cristóbal J. Alex
President, Latino Victory Project

Shekar Narasimhan
Chairman, AAPI Victory Fund

Wael Alzayat
CEO, Emgage

Rashad Robinson
Executive Director, Color Of Change