

City of Boston In City Council

Order Regarding The Low-Power FM Radio Campaign by **Councillor Chuck Turner**

February 3, 2009

WHEREAS, the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 led to increased ownership consolidation in the commercial radio industry; and

WHEREAS, in January 2000 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) responded to the overwhelming public pressure to democratize the radio airwaves by creating the Low-power FM (LPFM) service. The service was designed to allow community groups to launch non-commercial, 100-watt radio stations in order to increase diversity of programming on the airwaves; and

WHEREAS, in December 2000 Congress, under intense pressure from corporate broadcasters, passed the Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act, which severely curtailed the new LPFM service, with the result that 80% of opportunities for new stations were lost. Urban areas were particularly affected by the Act, with the result that, of the fifty largest American cities, only one now qualifies to receive an LPFM license. This is particularly egregious because the service is particularly well-suited for densely populated urban areas, in which an LPFM station's small signal can reach a large amount of people; and

WHEREAS, in July 2003 the FCC released an independent study commissioned by Congress to determine whether LPFM stations interfere with existing broadcasters. The study authors, engineers at the MITRE Corporation, not only found that LPFM stations cause no significant interference to existing stations; they also recommended that the LPFM service be restored to the form originally given it by the FCC. Restoring the service to its original form would mean that thousands more community groups across the country - including in our cities - would have access to the airwaves; and

WHEREAS, Over 800 LPFM stations were allowed to proceed which were unaffected by the criteria set by the congressional action. These stations are currently on the air and are run by local government agencies, groups promoting arts and education to immigrant and indigenous peoples, artists, schools, religious organizations, environmental groups, organizations promoting literacy, and many other civically-oriented organizations; and

WHEREAS, the FCC regularly issues licenses for similarly powered "translator" stations, which can repeat numerous times across the country the signal of a full power station, but currently does not give these channels to local groups seeking a first FM signal; and

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WHEREAS, a commitment to localism—local operations, local research, local management, locally-originated programming, local artists, and local news and events—has increased radio listening to noncommercial educational radio stations; and

WHEREAS, there is widespread concern at the corporate consolidation of media and its ability to serve the needs of local communities, inform debate on public policy, and ensure citizen access the radio airwaves; and

WHEREAS, the availability of local, democratically-controlled media outlets is essential to promoting citizen participation in public affairs, ensuring rapid responses to natural disasters, overcoming historic inequalities in access to the means of communication and a strengthening a vibrant democracy. THEREFORE, be it

ORDERED, the appropriate Committee of the City Council hold a hearing to invite Charles Clemons of Touch 106.1 and others to discuss the struggle to develop low power stations in Boston and the U.S.