



February 13, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell

Chair

**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Washington, DC 20510**

The Honorable Ted Cruz

Ranking Member

**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Washington, DC 20510**

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 230 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we write to convey our strong support for the nomination of Gigi B. Sohn to serve as commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). At a time when access to reliable, diverse news and information, as well as affordable broadband and communications, is paramount, a fully staffed FCC is a top priority for the nation and for the constituencies we represent. Ms. Sohn is an exemplary, history-making nominee for this position and should be swiftly confirmed.

Too many people in the United States still lack access to communications services that make equal opportunity and democratic participation possible. The FCC needs all five commissioners to produce digital discrimination rules, ensure the accuracy of broadband maps, and more. Ms. Sohn's confirmation will alleviate the gridlock that has recently prevented the FCC from carrying out a robust pro-civil rights agenda. Thus, her nomination is of particular importance to our civil and human rights coalition and to the communities we represent.

More than a year has passed since Ms. Sohn's original nomination, and it has been more than two years since the FCC had five sitting commissioners. President Biden nominated Ms. Sohn on October 26, 2021 and renominated her on January 3, 2023. Recent reports indicate that the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation intends to move her nomination soon, and we are in full support of this effort.

Ms. Sohn is a champion of the issues that the communities we represent care about deeply. As former FCC commissioner Mignon Clyburn has pointed out, Ms. Sohn has been a strong voice for media diversity and helped underrepresented communities in industry gain access

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to communications platforms.¹ While she served as top advisor to FCC chairman Tom Wheeler, Ms. Sohn worked closely with the commissioners and staff to reduce predatory prison phone rates.² These reforms were important because inadequate communications policy for carceral communications has a disproportionate impact on Black and Brown communities. Further, Ms. Sohn has been a tireless advocate for universal service and has a strong track record of promoting policies that make internet access more affordable for low-income individuals, people of color, and people living on tribal lands.³ She recently worked closely with industry and members of Congress to develop the Emergency Broadband Benefit program (now the \$14 billion Affordable Connectivity Program) and helped shape the broadband provisions in the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure bill.⁴ She has been attentive to the needs of marginalized communities throughout her 30-year career, and she will undoubtedly continue to fight for vulnerable communities as an FCC commissioner.

Despite the strong evidence supporting her qualifications for this position, Ms. Sohn, who would be the first openly LGBTQ commissioner in history,⁵ has faced a coordinated string of dangerous, homophobic attacks.⁶ Ms. Sohn is highly qualified for the role of FCC commissioner, possesses deep knowledge of the challenges faced by disadvantaged populations, and has a demonstrated longstanding commitment to collaboration with civil rights stakeholders. She is the right person for the job, and her confirmation should not be delayed any longer.

For these reasons, we urge the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation to ensure that Gigi Sohn's nomination is considered by the committee as soon as possible and reported favorably to the full Senate. Should you have any questions, please contact Jonathan Walter, policy counsel for the media & tech program at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at walter@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
African American Ministers in Action

¹ Mignon Clyburn, "Policy Versus Politics: Gigi Sohn's Years of Support for Empowerment and Inclusion Deserve Confirmation," *Broadcasting + Cable* (Dec. 2, 2021), <https://www.nexttv.com/blogs/policy-versus-politics-sohns-years-of-support-for-empowerment-and-inclusion-deserve-confirmation>.

² *Id.*

³ Gloria Tristani, "In This Critical Moment for Digital Access, We Must Confirm Gigi Sohn for the FCC," *The Hill* (Jan. 08, 2022), <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/588737-in-this-critical-moment-for-digital-access-we-must-confirm-gigi-sohn-for/>.

⁴ Chad Rupe, "Rural America Needs Gigi Sohn at the FCC," *Daily Yonder* (Mar. 28, 2022), <https://dailyyonder.com/commentary-rural-america-needs-gigi-sohn-at-the-fcc/2022/03/28/>.

⁵ "Setting the Record Straight: EFF Statement in Support of FCC Nominee Gigi Sohn," *Electronic Frontier Foundation* (Jan. 31, 2023), <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2023/01/setting-record-straight-eff-statement-support-fcc-nominee-gigi-sohn>.

⁶ Kevin Collier and Jason Abbruzzese, "Smear Campaign Targets Nominee Who Would Be FCC's First Openly Gay Commissioner," *NBC News* (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/fcc-gigi-sohn-nomination-turns-ugly-rcna68224>.

American Association of People with Disabilities
American Humanist Association
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Benton Institute for Broadband and Society
Catholics for Choice
Center for Democracy & Technology
Coalition on Human Needs
Color of Change
Common Cause
Communications Workers of America
Crescent City Media Group
Daily Kos
Demand Progress Action
Equality California
GLBTQ Legal Advocates
GLSEN
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
Impact Fund
Japanese American Citizens League
Lawyers for Good Governance
LGBTQ Victory Institute
MediaJustice
Muslim Advocates
NAACP
National Fair Housing Alliance
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
New America’s Open Technology Institute
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