

# National Black Church Initiative

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## THE NATIONAL BLACK CHURCH INITIATIVE PROUDLY SUPPORTS THE AT&T/T-MOBILE MERGER

*NBCI Has Thoroughly Researched the Merger Implications*

**Washington DC** – The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans committed to eradicating racial disparities in the technological arena. NBCI, which is funded by its member churches, has developed a Digital Divide Initiative in response to the rising importance of technology in American life and the impact of the telecommunication industry on citizens, families, small businesses and society as a whole.

According to the NBCI President Rev. Anthony Evans, “The black church wants to ensure that we are heard on this most important merger. After doing our due diligence – analyzing and researching over 4,000 pieces of literature, some of which is not even in the public domain – we have concluded that the merger deserves our support during a critical time in our nation’s history and in light of the needs of black consumers and small businesses. ”

There are four outstanding issues for the black faith community:

### 1. **Net Neutrality**

NBCI is a proponent of net neutrality and firmly advocates for equal access to the advances that propel Americans into the highest stratosphere of innovation and intelligence. We believe that the Internet is a great equalizer and our support of open access to telecommunications is rooted in this belief. In February of 2008, NBCI succinctly stated our position:

*“We support the right of individuals to do the following:*

- *Access the lawful Internet content of their choice.*
- *Run applications and use services of their choice, subject to the needs of law enforcement.*
- *Connect their choice of legal devices that do not harm the network.*
- *Enjoy competition among network providers, application and service providers, and content providers.*

*NBCI believes that it would be counterproductive if we did not address Internet Service Providers’ (ISPs) needs for innovation and the ability to make money. NBCI believes*

*that these two principles go hand-in-hand. Our position is clear concerning access, but we must also advocate for minority vendors who may be providers to make a living from this new and exciting technology. Therefore, NBCI will always support those Internet Service Providers who offer reasonable proposals for profit and do not restrict user's access to the web. NBCI does not want to see a rise in electronic segregation that will create classes of haves and have-nots.”* (<http://www.naltblackchurch.com/technology/pdf/net-neutrality.pdf>)

## **2. Protecting the Interests of NBCI's 70,000 Small Business Members**

Among our 15.7 million members, 70,000 are small business owners. In the midst of this double dip recession, small businesses are particularly fragile and require diligent advocacy – we take that responsibility very seriously. Small businesses must have access to the Internet and other essential telecommunication services to remain relevant, buoyant, and successful. NBCI small business members can ill afford to be excluded from competition for ISP partnerships; their very livelihoods depend on their ability to modernize along with their big-business competitors.

Additionally, given that small businesses are an essential component to the employment of African Americans nationwide, we can ill afford to stymie their growth in any way – equal access to this technology platform enhances service delivery and the development of affinity tools.

Our motives are selfish yet noble – by allowing small businesses to flourish we nourish the economy and protect our members. The benefits of this upswing translate into prosperity for all.

## **3. Low and Middle Income Benefits**

NBCI understands that there is a cost to innovation. Low and middle income Americans cannot and should not shoulder this burden.

Although most mergers raise prices, it appears clear that wireless prices have declined in the wake of several mergers in the past decade. The cost-conscious market presents the greatest economic opportunity for wireless companies, and competition for that market is intense. While prices might need to be increased to suppress demand if spectrum in large markets is exhausted, the aggregation of two large companies' spectrum ought to avoid that scenario.

## **4. Church-Based Technology**

The modernization of the church is essential to the success of the church. We are heavily dependent on technology to keep track of, inform, motivate, and best serve our membership.

The telecommunication industry has made little effort to serve this vast market. All sectors of society turn to the church for help, in one way or another. Due to the complexity of the church's role as a dual provider of both moral authority and social services, up to date technology services must be in place within the church to adequately manage these responsibilities. One of the responsibilities of the church that has been aggressively utilized in the past five years is the church's disaster management response. Our challenge has been to maintain the level of care society has come to expect while addressing the complications of cost, access and long term presence. Technology is essential to improve this important

component of church charity – we believe that now is the time to address this issue, making the timing of this merger particularly relevant.

After NBCI research staff sorted through over 4,000 documents and NBCI leadership participated in two major phone conferences with 35 leading African American bishops, we have come to our final conclusion: **NBCI is favor of the AT&T/T-Mobile merger.**

We firmly disagree with the assertion that this merger would create a duopoly – there are many players in the telecommunication sector, many of which have yet to fully make their mark. For example, Microsoft, Google, Yahoo and Facebook are some of the emerging companies whose technology and resources will continue to impact the balance of power in voice and data telecommunications.

Among the many compelling reasons NBCI supports the AT&T and T-Mobile merger our commitment to small businesses. The small business sector supports the African American community and given the monumental disparities in employment. NBCI cannot afford to turn away any wave of knowledge, connectedness, or innovation. Given AT&T's 40-year history of supporting African American small businesses we are confident that AT&T will continue to support the many experienced, intelligent and able African American sub-contractors, contractors, and potential employees waiting to join AT&T during the post-merger integration.

Rev. Mark McCleary, Chair of the NBCI Minister Alliance says, “This has not been an easy experience – there have been lengthy discussions on the pros and cons of this issue. I truly believe that this journey represents a maturing of the black church and an enhanced ability to protect our members from adverse economic developments. We have always understood the importance of shaping our destiny and we will not allow external forces to begin now. Our endorsement of the AT&T/T-Mobile merger reaffirms our primary role as an advocate for our member churches and congregants.”

NBCI would like to congratulate AT&T and T-Mobile and we look forward to a future where technological advancements are available to all.

### **About NBCI**

The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI's mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI's programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work. Visit our website at [www.naltblackchurch.com](http://www.naltblackchurch.com).