Remarks for Media Action Grassroots Network Town Hall – Oct. 27th 2014

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Thanks to the Media Action Grassroots Network for organizing this town hall.

My name is Dennis Chin and I am with the Center for Social Inclusion, a national policy strategy organization whose mission is to dismantle structural racial inequity.

The fight for internet freedom is also a fight for affordable, quality, high-speed internet options especially for low-income communities, rural communities and communities of color, many of whom have been historically redlined from fast, reliable and affordable internet.

But, it’s these communities who are showing us the way forward.

For example, the Brooklyn-based Red Hook Initiative paved the way to keep their community online, connected and communicating during and after Hurricane Sandy. They were vital to coordinating aid in the aftermath of the storm. They are able to provide their neighborhood with a wireless mesh network partly because they partner with a small, independent internet service provider called Brooklyn Fiber. This network shifts power away from giant telecoms who are largely absent in terms of their presence and connection to the communities they serve. This is powerful stuff. Imagine the implications if we saw more of these kinds of networks.

I mention the Red Hook’s network because we need more tools in our fight for internet freedom. The wireless mesh network is just one community-driven example of the types of infrastructure that would better serve all communities because it’s tailored and responsive to community need.

So what do we do now? In NYC, yes, we must demand community benefits from giant telecoms. We must challenge rules that give giant telecoms the power to control what we access on the internet. And, we must also work to finance and support community-scale projects like the ones we’re seeing in Red Hook that actually shift power and open up economic opportunities - jobs, education - for the historically underrepresented and underserved communities - often communities of color.

The solutions we need are happening right now in our communities. Let’s listen to them.

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