

H.B. 957. Testimony of Kevin Erickson
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Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Kevin Erickson. I am the director of Future of Music Coalition, which is a non-profit organization working to advance the interests of musicians on the issues that impact their lives and their livelihoods.

I'm also a record producer and musician based in Silver Spring. And today I want to talk briefly about why Net Neutrality is so important to the communities that I work with—diverse communities of musicians, songwriters, producers and independent labels.

Let me start by making some of my operating assumptions clear. Music is a business. And it's also much more than a business.

Musicians have very different kinds of careers but from a singer songwriter to a symphony orchestra they typically need two basic things:

- 1) The ability to reach audiences on their terms
- 2) The ability to be fairly compensated for their work on their terms.

On both on those fronts, net neutrality is absolutely crucial.

The internet is an integral part of how musicians do our work. It's how we book and promote tours and events, it's how we reach audiences, sell merchandise; it's how we make our voices heard.

In many contexts, we've seen that in the absence of strong rules of the road, if large corporations imagine they can make money by standing in between musicians and their audiences, well, they're going to try to do so. We've seen it in commercial radio with payola. For diverse businesses to thrive we need protection against this gatekeeper behavior so music can compete on its merits and so we can figure out how to run our businesses in ways that make sense for us. Net neutrality means that digital services must compete to better serve the needs of listeners and musicians rather than competing to make the best deals with ISPs or the entities with the most resources. We need an internet that works just as well for small independent creators as it does for platinum selling stars, an internet that works as well for a grassroots arts nonprofit as it does for Amazon or Youtube.

Now remember, I said music is much more than a business. It's more than commerce and entertainment; it's a form of communication older than language, a vehicle for communities elevate and address issues of concern. And that's true if you're talking about hiphop in Baltimore, or folk music in Takoma Park or queer punk bands I'm recording in my basement.

And so any conversation about music also has implications for expression, for the expressive life of our communities. Again, Net Neutrality is crucial. It means that ISPs can't censor or prioritize lawful speech on the basis of your point of view. It's why musicians and arts and culture groups were some of the earliest and loudest advocates for net neutrality and why we stay in the fight today even as federal policymakers disappoint us.

So...the opportunity we have get the rules right here in Maryland is a meaningful one. It's not a silver bullet to a fair and equitable competitive landscape or a healthy internet, but it is absolutely a necessary baseline for healthy music cultures, for creative expression. And so we want to ask you today to get this done. Thank you.