



GIGI SOHN

FORMER COUNSELOR TO FCC CHAIRMAN AND
CO-FOUNDER OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

NationalJournal

Life in Brief

Hometown: Silver Spring, MD

Current Residence: Washington, DC

Education:

- JD, University of Pennsylvania, 1986
- BA, Boston University, 1983

Family:

- Married to Lara Ann Ballard, Special Advisor for Privacy and Technology at State Department
- Teenage daughter

Work History:

- Distinguished Fellow, Georgetown Law Institute for Technology Law & Policy, 2017-Present
- Senior Fellow & Public Advocate, Benton Institute, 2018-Present
- Technology Policy Fellow, Mozilla Foundation, 2017-18
- Leadership in Government Fellow, Open Society Foundations, 2017-18
- Federal Communications Commission
 - Counselor to the Chairman, 2015-16
 - Special Counsel for External Affairs, 2013-15
- Co-founder and President, Public Knowledge, 2001-13
- Project Specialist, Ford Foundation, 1999-2001
- Media Access Project
 - Executive Director, 1996-99
 - Deputy Director, 1990-96
 - Staff Attorney, 1988-90
- Associate, Zuckert, Scott & Rasenberger, 1986-88

Past and Present Board and Advisory

Roles:

- Board Member, Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Board Member, Telecommunications Policy Research Conference
- Board Member, Broadcasters' Child Development Center
- Advisory Board, Future of Music Coalition

Quick Summary

Longtime communications policy expert and public advocate defending consumer access and promoting competition. A key voice shaping Obama-era net neutrality rules, Sohn has navigated the policy, nonprofit, and advocacy worlds

- Communications policy expert focused on promoting open, affordable, equally accessible communications networks
- Emphasizes need to preserve democratic media and ensure consumer access
- Straddles non-profit advocacy and FCC communities
- Key proponent of net neutrality rules as counsel to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler
- Frequently testifies before Congress on issues impacting communications competition

Approach and Motivations

Protecting consumers and expanding access to information

- Believes government should safeguard consumers and promote competition, often through regulation and antitrust measures
- Believes that a healthy democracy cannot exist without the free flow of information, and thus fights for policies she believes enhance access to information like rural broadband expansion and net neutrality
- Sees the power of large communications corporations and media consolidation as a threat to equal access

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

Champions consumer protection and equality in the digital and communications space

Staunch Supporter of Net Neutrality – *Fierce advocate for a “free and open” internet*

- Influential role in FCC adoption of Obama-era net neutrality rules
- Believes net neutrality is necessary for FCC to protect consumers and promote competition
- Argues that repeal of net neutrality rules puts online innovation at risk; believes it has negatively impacted social justice and reduced access to isolated, vulnerable communities

Consumer Privacy Protection – *Advocate for online privacy laws*

- Criticized repeal of federal broadband privacy rules in 2016; encouraged states to pass own laws requiring broadband providers to protect consumer privacy
- Supports federal consumer privacy law that permits opting in and out of data collection so consumers have more control over their data

Access to High Speed Internet – *Pushes for equitable access to digital communications*

- Supports pre-empting state restrictions on community broadband and reinstatement of FCC authority over broadband
- Believes federal resources should be committed to fund broadband infrastructure in communities currently lacking

Media Consolidation – *Skeptical of large mergers for stifling competition*

- Criticized T-Mobile-Sprint merger because she believes it would result in reduced competition and higher prices for customers of prepaid service – who tend to be lower income and people of color

Core Communities

Connections to digital and communications policy circles in the private, public, and non-profit industries

Digital Public Interest Community – *Close with former colleagues from attorney-advocate career*

- Co-founded public interest intellectual property group Public Knowledge with Laurie Racine and David Bollier
- Served as executive director of the Media Access Project alongside its former SVP Andrew Schwartzman, who is a mentor
- Longtime colleague at Public Knowledge with current Legal Director, John Bergmayer

FCC Alumni – *Served as counsel to the FCC commissioner for three years*

- Worked with Karen Peltz Strauss, former FCC Deputy Bureau Chief and fellow Penn Law alumni
- Friend of former FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn; spoke at Clyburn's retirement
- Counsel and close confidante to former FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler
- Fellow at Benton Institute with Jonathan Sallet, former FCC General Counsel

Telecom Industry – *Good relationships with industry players who she often opposes on policy*

- Former president of National Cable and Telecommunication Association, Kyle McSillarow, is a friend
- Kathy Brown, former SVP of Verizon, has expressed similar friendship despite being on the opposite side of net neutrality
- Serves on Electronic Frontier Foundation board with former VP and Deputy General Counsel of Verizon, Sarah Deutsch

Core Communities Cont.

Internet Pioneers – *Several professional connections to internet innovators*

- Serves on Electronic Frontier Foundation board with Brian Behlendorf, co-founder of Apache Group; Brewster Kahle, co-founder of the Internet Archive; and John Gilmore, co-author of what eventually became Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP)

Selected Publications

Focused on academic articles early in career; more recently focused on policy commentary

Academic – *Wrote about tech law and policy*

- [“The Gore Commission Ten Years Later: Reimagining the Public Interest Standard in an Era of Spectrum Abundance,”](#) *CommLaw Conspectus: Journal of Communications Law and Technology Policy*, 2008
- [“Don’t Mess with Success: Government Technology Mandates and the Marketplace for Online Content”](#), *Journal on Telecommunications and High Technology Law*, 2006

Editorial – *Comments on net neutrality and communications mergers*

- [“Promises mean little for consumers in T-Mobile-Sprint deal,”](#) *Wired*, May 2018
- [“Breaking down the FCC’s proposal to destroy net neutrality,”](#) *The Verge*, May 2017

Financial Disclosures and Donations

Infrequent donations to Democratic candidates running for federal office

Federal – Presidential, 2008-19

- \$350 – Kamala Harris For the People
- \$500 – Warren for President (D-MA)
- \$250 – Cory 2020 (D-NJ)
- \$1,000 – Hillary for America (D-NY)
- \$4,500 – Obama for America (D-IL)

Federal – Senate

- \$1,000 – Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
- \$750 – Al Franken (D-MN)
- \$1,000 – Ed Markey (D-MA)

Media Appearances

Appears across primarily online media and favors more policy-based interviews with technology publications

Beltway Outlets – *Frequent guest discussing digital and communications policy issues*

- [The Hill](#): Criticized Andrew Yang’s proposal to treat data as personal property, October, 2019
- [Rising with Krystal & Saagar](#): Discussed the need for a comprehensive federal consumer privacy law, October, 2019

Tech Publications – *Resource for tech stories about telecom mergers and net neutrality*

- [The Verge](#): Interviewed for the Vergecast about the T-Mobile/Sprint merger and expressed skepticism about the prospect of increased competition, October 2019
- [Vice Motherboard](#): Criticized the repeal of Obama-era net neutrality rules, January 2019

Speaking Engagements

Frequently discusses net neutrality and advocating for internet fairness and openness

- Panelist at New America’s INCOMPAS Policy Summit debating Sprint-T-Mobile merger, February 2019
- Delivered remarks at University of Pittsburgh Law School Symposium about net neutrality and the economic, regulatory, and information access impacts, February 2019
- Spoke at event hosted by Great Lakes Connect in Ohio about importance of FCC, September 2018
- Keynote speaker at 17th Annual Oregon Connections Telecommunications Conference about the broadband ecosystem and cloud technology, October 2012

Profiles Others Have Written

Fredda Sacharow: "[FCC Watchdog Goes From Making Waves to Making Policy](#)," *Penn Law Journal*, Summer 2014

- Profile on her early life and career, and her transition from the public interest community to the FCC

Formative Years

Early years as a public interest lawyer ignited her interest in communications policy

- Interest in media's impact fostered by writing for student newspaper at Boston University
- Influenced by the work of Everett Parker and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in challenging broadcast license of TV station in Jackson, MS that refused to cover civil rights movement
- When internet became mainstream in 1998-1999, began to view it as a means of empowering individuals
- Mentored by Andrew Schwartzmann of Media Access Project

Family Background

- Born in Silver Spring, grew up on Long Island in Jewish household
- Father Marvin Sohn was a CPA; mother Roma Sohn was a Physician Associate
- Adopted daughter
- Brother, Adam Sohn, is an executive at the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)
- Active member of Tikvat Israel Congregation