

Keeping Seniors Connected Coalition

Assisting Seniors in the Digital Television Conversion

January 9, 2009

Honorable Henry Waxman
Chair
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Minority Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator John D. Rockefeller IV
Chair, Committee on
Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Minority Member, Committee on
Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Waxman, Ranking Member Barton, Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison:

As national aging organizations deeply concerned about how our nation's most vulnerable older adults will fare in the upcoming Digital Television Transition, the undersigned members of the Keeping Seniors Connected coalition urge you to take action on several pressing matters related to the February 17, 2009 DTV transition.

Given recent events, we recommend that Congress:

- **Allow NTIA to immediately issue coupons to those on the waiting list, to prevent further delay of an already overlong process for consumers.**
- **Provide an infusion of funding to the coupon program to ensure that, at the very least, every household that needs the coupon is able to secure one.**
- **Delay the implementation date of February 17 by at least 60 days to ensure that individuals have access to coupons, converter boxes and one-on-one assistance, if needed, to connect the technology.**
- **Take appropriate action to ensure that sufficient affordable converter boxes are available to consumers.**

Since the coalition was formed in late 2007, we have shared our concerns about the needs of older adults in the DTV transition with all interested parties: Congress, the Administration, private industry and others organizations working on DTV. We have repeatedly articulated our view that there were simply not enough resources at a national and community level to ensure that no vulnerable senior would be left behind on February 17, with a dark television and no access to emergency information, news or the regular programming that is often a social lifeline for isolated elders.

As individual organizations or as a coalition, we testified before Congress and briefed and met regularly with Congressional staff, participated in numerous panels for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), met frequently with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and looked to partner with private industry—all in order to better assist those older adults most likely to be left behind: the homebound, minority, frail, rural or low-income.

Meanwhile, and despite the limitations of our own resources to address this critical issue, the community-based agencies, aging service programs and senior advocates that comprise our organizations' membership have been working, day in and day out, to help older adults in their communities successfully manage the DTV transition. This work will only intensify over the next few weeks as the transition date approaches.

With the recent troubling news that NTIA has reached its spending cap and thus that all new coupon applicants are being placed on waiting lists, as well as the recently released information that an insufficient amount of DTV converter boxes may be on the market to meet demand, and acquiring the converter box may not be enough for some who will also need a new antennae and assistance with that installation, our concerns about the seniors we serve have only intensified.

While we recognize that changing a long-standing implementation date should not be undertaken lightly and may create further complexity, we believe that a reasonable delay of the analog-to-digital switch is the most responsible way to deal with the challenges we face. Furthermore, a delay is completely consistent with the impetus behind this change itself, namely ensuring the security and emergency preparedness of our nation's most vulnerable populations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores (National Association for Hispanic Elderly)
Meals On Wheels Association of America
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of State Units on Aging
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.
National Council on Aging