

April 4, 2008

The Honorable Kevin Martin
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

On behalf of the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC), **I urge you to designate a fund to support non-profit and community organizations' efforts to educate and assist the most vulnerable household population with the digital television (DTV) transition.**

On February 17, 2009 the nation will switch from over-the-air analog to digital broadcasting. As you have instructed, the CAC has been reviewing the most effective measures for the FCC to employ that will inform and assist consumers with the DTV transition. In the fall, the CAC submitted comments during the Commission's consideration of its Digital Television Consumer Education Order.

Although the DTV conversion will provide the opportunity to build a public safety network for emergency planners and responders, this transition cannot take place at the expense of leaving out our most vulnerable citizens. This community includes households that are low-income, non-English speaking, disabled, older, or rural.

Current data indicates that a disproportionate number of analog households are within these communities. These households are at the greatest risk of losing their television access – and confront the greatest challenges in taking the steps necessary for a successful DTV transition.

There are non-profit, community and religious institutions ready to assist with the DTV transition. The organizations include elderly home visit and meal programs, churches and synagogues, community-based consumer assistance programs, and many volunteer organizations. Unfortunately, most of these organizations already manage their programs on extremely tight budgets, with limited or no funding for special programs. It is difficult, if not impossible, for them to add the additional task of informing and assisting consumers with the DTV transition. Although they may be dedicated to offering some assistance, they won't be able to effectively help with this transition unless they receive support. Unfortunately, good intentions are not enough to guarantee that every household stays connected to television after February 17, 2009.

The CAC recommends that the FCC appropriate some of the funds Congress has provided for consumer education and outreach for 2008, and for 2009, to help fund the community and non-profit organizations that serve the most vulnerable communities. Financial support will offer an opportunity for education and awareness and general

one-on-one assistance. Here are several general activities that could be accomplished with the FCC's financial support:

1) Education and Awareness:

Hosting educational sessions and events;

Distributing DTV information and multilingual flyers;

Helping consumers address questions and directing them to additional resources to provide further information;

Producing information, including videos with captioning and video description, presenting DTV information in American Sign Language; and

Presentations specifically oriented toward the special needs of most vulnerable households.

2) Direct Assistance:

Use home-delivered meal programs, volunteer companion programs, and other in-home programs to help consumers complete a home assessment to evaluate their transition needs; and

Offer assistance to homebound, mobility-challenged, and disabled consumers with the purchase and installation of the converter boxes.

The CAC recognizes the extent of outreach work currently underway by the FCC, NTIA, the industry, non-profit organizations, and community groups. While we share in the nation's commitment for a smooth and successful DTV transition, there is so much more that needs to be accomplished before February 17, 2009. Without financial assistance, many organizations with the best of intentions will be unable to assist any further. The transition is at risk of stalling – or worse yet, leaving consumers without television access – and we can't afford to change course at this time.

It is imperative that the FCC designate funds as soon as possible to assist community and non-profit organizations with DTV transition outreach and assistance activities. With every month that passes, we get closer to the reality that millions of households will lose their television broadcasting service.

Thank you for your attention to this recommendation for action.

Sincerely,

Debra Berlyn
Chairperson
Consumer Advisory Committee

Cc: Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell

