

February 2, 2009

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
Chairman  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman:

We write on behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and Consumers Union to commend your leadership on the extending the digital television transition. We were very pleased to see the Senate unanimously pass S.352, *The DTV Delay Act*, and urge the House of Representative to quickly pass and implement this legislation.

Without a delay, more than 10 million consumers who depend on free, over-the-air television could be left in the dark on February 17. The people most likely to lose television service are among the most vulnerable, including communities of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and low-income households.

In early January, the Commerce Department hit the \$1.34 billion cap provided by Congress for the digital converter box coupon program that was created to offset the cost of this federally mandated transition for consumers. Since then, more than three million requests have been put on a waiting list – and that list is growing longer each day. In addition to miscalculating consumer demand for the coupons, the rigid structure of the coupon program has made it extremely difficult for consumers to receive and use their coupons. Those that have successfully requested coupons are waiting up to eight weeks before receiving them and millions of consumers have been stuck with expired coupons while waiting for better and less expensive converter box choices to hit the marketplace. This legislation will allow enough time to get money in the program, expedite delivery of the coupons and allow consumers with expired coupons to reapply so that the most vulnerable consumers don't have to pay for the big switch out of their own pockets.

The additional time will also allow the government to adopt a plan to minimize the number of viewers who will lose TV signals. More specifically, postponement will allow the government to improve the organization of the transition; and give the Obama administration and Congress time to fully fund and effectively deploy resources for local assistance to help consumers navigate the transition and hook up their boxes, as well as to respond to problems..

Many potentially costly misconceptions about the transition remain and extending the deadline will allow consumers additional time to navigate this complicated and complex switch to digital broadcasting. Consumers continue to feel confused about whether or not they need a converter box; which box to buy; what to do if they lose a station they received in analog; and where to turn for local

assistance and guidance. More time would allow consumers time to find the correct answers to these questions. We believe that the least confusing aspect of this transition for consumers is the date.

Consumers Union and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights urge the U.S. House of Representatives to approve this important legislation as quickly as possible and ensure that communities and consumers are not unfairly and excessively burdened by the nation's transition to digital television. We remain committed to working with you and the Energy and Commerce Committee to ensure consumers take action and get the equipment they need to maintain access to essential news and information.

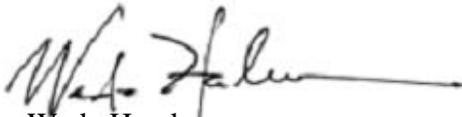
Regards,



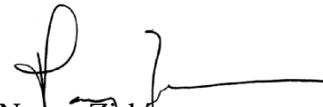
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