

**FCC OPEN COMMISSION MEETING**  
Industry and Consumer Group Reports on the  
Status of the DTV Transition and Prospects for June 12, 2009

TESTIMONY OF ERICA SWANSON  
Deputy Director for Field Operations and Director for DTV Assistance Campaign,  
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund

JUNE 3, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Commissioner Adelstein, and Commissioner McDowell.

As everyone here knows quite well, digital television signals have been available and in use for some time. A third of television broadcasting stations switched over to all digital transmission by February 17 of this year, the original date for the national digital television transition. That date would have left many millions of Americans across the nation in the dark, left out and unconnected to their sole source for important weather, emergency and disaster information.

Fortunately, Congress extended the deadline to June 12<sup>th</sup> -- providing four additional, critical months to improve and fund the coupon program, clear the coupon waiting list, provide support to local organizations that offer community assistance, and significantly raise public awareness and clear consumer confusion. Now that June 12<sup>th</sup> is upon us, we can safely say that the situation is much better than it would have been in mid-February. But while June 12<sup>th</sup> marks the national DTV deadline, it neither marks the end of the transition - nor the end of our work.

Despite our best efforts -- and despite the best efforts of thousands around the country -- when full power analog signals are turned off, hundreds of thousands of households will likely be left behind. Perhaps it's because they are older Americans confused by the technology, maybe it's because they get their information in a language other than English and don't know if the switch will impact them, or maybe they live on a fixed income and haven't been able to afford a converter box.

While these people represent a small percentage of the overall population -- they are our nation's most vulnerable members.

That is why the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, a coalition of 200 civil and human rights organizations - has partnered with national and local organizations to reach and assist those who are most vulnerable. With the support of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, LCCREF has coordinated a comprehensive, on-the-ground campaign in seven cities: Atlanta, GA; Detroit, MI; Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; Portland, OR; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco-San Jose-Oakland CA; and Seattle-Tacoma, WA.

Our campaign has been met with tremendous response, surpassing our initial benchmarks and goals and reaching far beyond our target audiences. Since mid-November, our local partners have conducted more than 2,500 DTV events and trainings and have provided direct assistance to some 150,000 people in need.

In recent weeks we have stepped up our work and taken it into the places where large numbers of people in need gather: churches and house of worship, community and senior centers, sporting events, festivals, libraries, schools, and markets. To give you just one example of what this work looks like, we've brought a short video from our partners in the Twin Cities.

[PLAY VIDEO]

Although each DTV Assistance Center and each city conducts work a little differently, assistance efforts like this are being duplicated in all of our campaign cities. And day in and day out we are finding that this kind of hands-on assistance -- help that is local, language-specific, and culturally appropriate -- is invaluable in reaching the hardest-to-reach communities.

From my travels around the country and from reports from the field, I know that over-the-air viewers struggle with numerous challenges. These challenges include securing converter box coupons - especially if their address isn't recognized by the coupon system; trying to install converter boxes; dealing with weak or obstructed digital signals and navigating antenna needs; and scanning and rescanning for digital channels that, occasionally, end up having to be entered manually.

These are challenges that are unlikely to disappear without continued assistance, particularly in the days and weeks following the June 12<sup>th</sup> deadline.

Of course, help is currently available, but it will probably need to be strengthened and extended to provide post-transition, "search and rescue" functions.

The national call center certainly will continue to be a useful resource, but it alone isn't enough. Given the array of technical challenges and cultural barriers, people also need to be offered the option of local assistance resources. This is critical work that is being supported by both NTIA and the FCC, but it is work that, as of now, is all currently slated to terminate by mid- or end- of July.

So what will happen next Friday, when the June 12<sup>th</sup> deadline arrives? And just as importantly, what will happen in the days and weeks that follow?

There are still many unknowns because of various other changes that will take place after the deadline, changes that may impact the reception of digital signals, as well as who is impacted by the transition.

Some broadcasters are setting up additional translators and transmitters that will boost the reach of their signals; others will be shifting their locations on broadcast towers. So we don't yet know what the "full reach" of these broadcasters will be, or when they'll reach it.

There is also the real world impact of interference, the full extent of which we won't know until all broadcasters are operating at full strength. And we don't yet know what seasonal weather changes will mean -- what will happen, for example, the first time Detroit experiences a major snowstorm or Atlanta experiences a severe thunderstorm.

In addition, many low power community broadcasters have not made the transition and may not anytime soon.

Finally, as reported both anecdotally and in recent news reports, many Americans who have been relying on cable or satellite for their television service are now - given the economic downturn - re-considering their options and in many cases choosing to return to over-the-air television.

So in many ways, June 12<sup>th</sup> is really an end and a beginning. The nation goes digital but there will still be a tremendous need for the continuation of the FCC call center and for local assistance that can provide real answers – in multiple languages – to help those who have not yet made the transition join the rest of the nation in our great technological leap forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity to talk with you about our DTV assistance work. I look forward to any questions you have.