United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 9, 2008

The Honorable Meredith Attwell Baker
Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Baker:

We are writing to request expedited approval of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) proposed rule change entitled the Household Eligibility and Application Process for Individuals Residing in Nursing Homes and Households that Utilize Post Office Boxes (47 CFR Part 301 RIN 0660-AA17), and to ask that the rule be accommodating and understanding of the needs of those who live in nursing homes. Seniors in nursing homes must have the same opportunity as all Americans to apply and receive coupons for digital converter boxes. An expedited approval of this rule will maximize the amount of time seniors in nursing homes have to make any necessary preparations for the digital television transition before the February 17th deadline.

The rule, which would allow each resident of a nursing home or other care facility to receive a coupon for a converter box, is critical to ensuring that each individual is not adversely affected by the digital television transition. Seniors account for 40 percent of the population that rely on over-the-air broadcasts. In addition, compared to other age groups, they tend to watch the most television -- an average of over six hours a day. At the same time, older residents in institutional settings face unique challenges, such as access to transportation or physical limitations, when it comes to preparing for the digital transition. It is imperative to approve this rule change in an expedited manner to provide this population adequate time to plan and overcome these obstacles prior to the transition deadline.

We are pleased that NTIA expedited the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Comment Period from 90 days to 45 days. While there is no timeline for NTIA to approve the rule change, we urge that NTIA approve this rule change expeditiously after the June 9, 2008 close of the comment period. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We look forward to working with you to facilitate this process to ensure seniors residing in nursing homes and other care facilities are able to fully participate in the coupon program. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Justin Field with Senator Menendez, at (202) 224-4727, or Cara Goldstein with Senator Kohl at (202) 224-5364.

Sincerely,

Robert Menendez

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

Herb Kohl

HERB KOHL
United States Senator

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
United States Senator

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senator

JACK REED
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United States Senator

JEFF BINGAMAN
United States Senator

BEN NELSON
United States Senator