



June 7, 2012

Re: Continuation of Cable Viewability Requirements for Digital Must Carry
Television Stations, CS Docket No. 98-120

To the Chairman and Commissioners, FCC:

I am writing on behalf of *Independent Voices for Local TV* in regards to the above captioned proceeding.

Throughout the DTV transition the dual public policy objectives expressed by a bi-partisan majority of Congress were the modernization and improvement of the nation's broadcast system and the protection of consumers during the transition.

And indeed, while broadcasters had largely concluded their upgrade to DTV by the end of 2006 – the original date for the transition set by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 – it was concern for consumer welfare that justified subsequent delays and consumer support programs before the transition for over-the-air viewers was finally concluded on June 12, 2009.

This consumer support included a massive year-long public education campaign by broadcasters, cable and satellite companies, and the government, as well as a \$1.5 billion program of financial support for consumers to purchase DTV converter boxes. This converter box program was run out of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”) in the Department of Commerce. As the Assistant Secretary of Commerce and Administrator of NTIA during the management of this program, I worked with all impacted industry stakeholders and consumer groups, and was directed by Congress during numerous Committee hearings and through many Committee communications, with the unified objective of ensuring that consumers would not be harmed by an unexpected interruption of vital broadcast programming and services.

In fact, out of an abundance of caution and concern for consumers one of President Obama's first acts was the authorization of a final 4 four month extension of the transition even after \$1.5 billion had been devoted to consumer assistance to buy converter boxes.

As a result of these efforts – spanning two administrations, and with the support of bi-partisan majorities in Congress – the DTV transition for over-the-air viewers concluded successfully.

Now, however, it is my understanding that the Commission is considering changes to the so-called “viewability rule” that would sunset in six months the requirement that broadcast signals be “viewable on all television sets that are connected to the cable system.” Such a dramatic and unexpected change would not only disrupt vital broadcast services, but would expose consumers to the very harms the government spent \$1.5 billion to avoid.

Cable systems across the country are investing billions of dollars to upgrade their systems to all digital platforms. As a result, within the three-year sunset that the Commission initially proposed in this proceeding as much as 95% of cable households would be served by all digital systems allowing all digital broadcasts to be viewable. Accelerating the “viewability rule” sunset by two and a half years serves no compelling purpose and would inflict the very consumer harm the decade-long DTV transition was meant to avoid.

Sincerely,

/s/

John M. R. Kneuer