



STATEMENT OF

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Chairman Inouye, Ranking Member Hutchison, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am pleased to report that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been working in partnership with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to ensure that the people we serve receive the information and assistance they need to make the transition from analog to digital TV broadcasts on February 17, 2009. Earlier this year in response to a request from FCC, Secretary Michael O. Leavitt established a work group of his operating divisions to encourage them to make special efforts to ensure that HHS was doing everything it could to get the message out. Many of the people we serve--the elderly, people who have disabilities, or are low-income, minorities, geographically isolated, homebound, or limited English speaking--are the primary audiences for whom the impact will be most challenging.

HHS staff have participated in forums and meetings throughout the country in order to make our respective networks aware of the DTV transition and what our agencies can do to help make it successful. I would like to share with you just a few examples of what we are doing.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is the primary Federal agency for improving access to health care services for people who are uninsured, isolated or medically vulnerable. HRSA has forwarded FCC DTV information to approximately 4,000 grantee organizations who serve approximately 16 million low-income people. They have also worked with organizations such as the State Primary Care Offices, the Primary Care Associations and the National Association for Community Health Centers. These organizations which represent many

more non-federally funded health centers and clinics nationwide were asked to post and distribute DTV flyers in their clinics and to distribute information to patients.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is responsible for Federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities.

Information has been distributed to their 1,600 Head Start grantees and Community Action Agencies, covering more than 18,000 centers around the country as well as through their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. The Office of Community Services (OCS) within ACF promotes the TV Converter Box Coupon Program during public engagements and conferences and encourages grantees and partner associations to invite FCC representatives to their activities to help educate the public about the DTV transition. More specifically, OCS has distributed English and Spanish *DTV Transition: February 17, 2009, "Are You Ready?"* flyers to over 100 State Community Service Block Grant, 600 Community Action Agency and 500 Weatherization and Low-Income Energy Assistance Program staff; posted information on the Web sites of partner associations that represent over 1,000 Community Action Agencies; and facilitated coupon sign-up events with over 100 Social Services Block Grant and Community Services Block Grant grantees. The Child Care Bureau conducted several outreach activities to inform the child care community serving low-income children and families. Activities include disseminating the flyers at the 14th National American Indian/Alaska Native Child Care Conference which was attended by over 500 tribal organizations; and emailing the flyer to the 50 State and 5 territory Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) administrators with the request that the flyer be disseminated to the families served by the program. Approximately 1 million families are served in an average month with CCDF funds. The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) informed all State child support enforcement programs of the DTV

initiative, prominently displayed the DTV transition logo and link on the OCSE web site, and invited child support agencies to either download or order hard copies through OCSE of the material to share with their clientele. OCSE filled many requests for the material from various agencies.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has focused its mission on building resilience and facilitating recovery for people with or at risk for mental or substance use disorders. They are using their call center that responds to requests for information from approximately 50,000 individuals each month as a means of informing people about the DTV transition.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) has distributed information to their 120 health facilities and worked with Tribes to distribute consumer information to an additional 300 tribally-managed health facilities.

Finally, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will embark on its fall Open Enrollment period from November 15th to December 31, 2008 where they will be reaching out to 44 million people with Medicare through approximately 10,000 events to enroll in a drug plan, review their health care and drug coverage, and make changes. CMS has agreed to share information with partner organizations about the DTV transition as a part of their outreach efforts using information provided by the NTIA.

I am proud to report that my agency, the Administration on Aging (AoA), was one of the first agencies in the Federal Government that FCC and NTIA approached to work in partnership with them because they wanted to ensure that as the transition progressed the special and unique needs

of older Americans were being addressed. As you know, AoA oversees the national aging services network (the network) which is comprised of 56 State Units on Aging designated by each governor; 655 local planning and service entities in geographic regions in the States known as Area Agencies on Aging; 239 tribal and native organizations, representing more than 300 Tribes; 29,000 local community service provider organizations; and more than 500,000 volunteers. We accomplish our mission through the provision of critical services to more than 10.7 million older individuals and family caregivers; 3 million of whom require intensive home care services; the provision of an array of health and social supports through 13 million information and referral contacts and by providing over 20 million people with outreach and information about services; by providing over 28 million rides to meal sites, doctor's offices and other critical activities; and by serving 237 million meals to prevent and manage chronic diseases. So you can see that we are in contact with older adults everyday. The community service provider organizations in our network consist of local community-based and faith-based organizations who are the visible and trusted source of information in the community and most often the place where older adults will turn for help.

Data indicate that seniors are more likely to have older analog television sets and are less likely to have cable television service. Many face physical, financial or transportation limitations that will impact their ability to successfully make the transition to digital television. Additionally, many may not be familiar or comfortable with the technology involved with the conversion. Although consumer education efforts are important, we also recognize the need to safeguard against up selling as well as fraud and abuse and the need to address the impact of requiring physical assistance related to installation, repairs and service of converter boxes. Providing consumer education and information does not produce access to converter boxes nor does it

produce appropriate installation of them for a frail, mobility challenged population who rely on television as a primary source of critical information such as weather and emergency announcements; for a sense of connectedness and for entertainment. Building on the successful outreach, education and individual assistance provided by the network in the implementation of Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Coverage and Preventive Benefits, we recognized early on that the network represented a perfect access point for reaching the older adults who would be most affected by the digital television conversion.

When NTIA reached out to us in the summer of 2007, we immediately agreed to help them with this effort. One of the first things that we did was to reach out to a coalition of national aging services organizations and advocacy groups representing the network. AoA granted access to and facilitated meetings and discussions with NTIA and FCC. Each of the 11 organizations in the coalition have a focus on the needs of older adults, particularly those most in need of services and supports as they age and/or those in diverse communities. They have experience in developing approaches to reach out and assist the most at-risk older adults and their caregivers. They have experience in reaching the hard-to-reach; such as rural, isolated and limited English-speaking older individuals. And they have well-established aging-related communications channels and networks.

Currently, the coalition is working towards providing direct education; one-on-one information; assistance in purchasing and acquiring converter boxes; as well as installation of the boxes so that vulnerable older adults can successfully manage the DTV transition. The members of the coalition communicate on a regular basis and we are working with them to identify ways in

which they could use the strengths of each group to maximize and leverage their resources at the local level.

AoA has participated in several FCC and NTIA forums on DTV and we applaud them for listening to our recommendations and being responsive to the issues we raised. We will continue to work in partnership with FCC and NTIA to provide information at aging conferences and exhibits occurring through the balance of the year. We will continue to distribute materials and information through our grantee and communications networks, such as our electronic newsletter that has 22,000 subscribers, as well as to our stakeholders and partners. Finally, we will refresh or update our Web site to ensure that links remain in a prominent location.

Currently at the community level, local senior centers, nutrition sites and other agencies are holding DTV information sessions. Many are working in partnership with the National Association of Broadcasters that has a DTV Speakers Bureau made up of local TV station broadcasters and others who are available to speak at local events. At these events, seniors are provided not only with information, but a hands-on demonstration on how to hook-up the converter box.

Additionally, Wilmington, North Carolina was the first market to test the transition to digital television (DTV) in advance of the nationwide transition to DTV on February 17, 2009. The commercial broadcasters serving the Wilmington television market voluntarily agreed to turn off their analog signals at noon on September 8, 2008. Our State and local aging agencies in North Carolina were very involved in the Wilmington test and have indicated that they have been working very closely with FCC representatives to help ensure a smooth transition.

We were pleased to learn that U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez announced last Tuesday that residents of licensed nursing homes, intermediate care facilities, assisted living facilities and households that use a post office box for mail delivery will be eligible to request coupons from the DTV Converter Box Coupon Program. This was an issue raised early on by aging advocates and this ruling demonstrates we are all working together to help make this transition as successful as possible.

Finally, the Department of Health and Human Services will continue to explore ways that we can reach out to our constituents to help ensure that no one is left in the dark on February 18, 2009. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.