

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)
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DTV Consumer Education Initiative) MB Docket No. 07-148
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Comments of the American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with some 65,000 members, primarily school, public, academic and some special librarians, but also trustees, publishers and friends of libraries. ALA's mission is to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on proposals relating to consumer education about the digital television (DTV) transition. Education – particularly related to the effective use of new technology – is a core professional responsibility for librarians. Furthermore, libraries are a trusted source of information on consumer issues and government programs. Additionally, to the extent that this education program is conducted online, libraries are the primary access point to the Internet for people who do not have connectivity at home or at work. Finally, public libraries have a record of success in communicating changes to government programs. For these reasons, we feel compelled to voice our concerns about the DTV transition.

We were gratified to note that in their letter to the Commission dated May 24, 2007, Representatives Dingell and Markey emphasized the importance of educating consumers about the DTV transition beyond simply informing them of the coupon program. Commissioner Copps echoed this need in his statement, arguing that in order to avoid a backlash, the government must educate consumers that the transition is something being done *for* them, not *to* them.

ALA strongly agrees that consumer education on the DTV transition must go beyond informing consumers of the existence of the NTIA coupon program. There are compelling reasons for the transition – including public safety concerns and freeing spectrum for broadband deployment – and providing this context for the transition will help consumers grasp its purpose and benefit.

While ALA won't comment on any of the specific education initiatives laid out by Representatives Dingell and Markey, we strongly encourage the commission to take a multi-

pronged approach to communicating with the public about the transition. We would also encourage the commission to consider the role of libraries in the community, both as providers of public access to the Internet, and as trusted sources of information on government programs.

Libraries serve as access points to information for the members of their communities. As such, the public utilizes libraries to access government information. Several government agencies realize the benefits of partnering with libraries as conduits to their targeted audience. With the roll out of Medicare Part D, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) worked with libraries by providing a general audience brochure that was distributed to public libraries across the country. Equipped with this resource, libraries were able to serve the public by answering their questions about this program and referring them to more information. Further, every year, the public comes into libraries to obtain copies of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax forms or to file their taxes online. By contrast, when the Medicare prescription plan went into effect, HHS did not actively partner with libraries, and libraries experienced difficulty in meeting the public's demand for information.

The role of libraries as a trusted source of government information and access continues in the digital age. According to a 2007 survey, 99% of public libraries offer free, public access to the Internet. The public uses the free Internet connection within the library to engage in E-Government activities with numerous transactions taking place between federal, state and local government and the people that they serve. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the public used the connectivity and resources of libraries to fill out the necessary electronic Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) forms to receive federal aid. Newly arrived foreign nationals often use public access terminals at the library to arrange their appointments with the US Customs and Immigration Service, another government process that is only available electronically.

In the instances mentioned above, the public trusts libraries, relies upon the expertise of library staff and depends on the connectivity within the library to fulfill their government information and E-Government needs. By partnering with libraries, federal agencies, including the FCC, can strengthen the expertise of library staff and utilize libraries as a way of creating an informed public.

To echo the sentiments of Representatives Dingell and Markey and Commissioners Copps and Adelstein, The American Library Association is both concerned about the rapidly approaching transition deadline, and optimistic about the possibility for a successful transition. We strongly feel that education is the key to a successful program, and we strongly encourage you to contact our office to discuss ways in which ALA members can assist the Commission in your outreach efforts.

Thank you for listening to our concerns.

Respectfully Submitted,

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