

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT  
OVERSIGHT – PREPARING FOR THE DIGITAL TELEVISION TRANSITION  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2008**

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Good Morning Chair Brewer and members of the City Council Committee on Technology in Government. My name is Jay Damashek and I am the Senior Managing Attorney at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, better known as DoITT. With me is David Berman, our Media and IT Counsel and the coordinator of DoITT's outreach program for the Digital Television (DTV) Transition. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding DoITT's efforts to educate New Yorkers about the February 17, 2009 DTV Transition and its implications. Following my remarks, the Department of Consumer Affairs and Department for the Aging will also be commenting on their outreach efforts, after which we will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

First, I would like to provide you with some background on the move toward digital television broadcasting that has led to this transition.

In 1996, the United States Congress authorized the distribution of an additional broadcast channel to each broadcast television station in order for stations to start a digital broadcast channel while simultaneously continuing its analog broadcast channel. Subsequently, Congress mandated that February 17, 2009 would be the last day for full power television stations to broadcast in analog. So today, broadcast stations in all U.S. markets are currently broadcasting in both analog and digital, but after this February date – 85 days from now – full power stations will be broadcast digitally only.

The reason for the switch is that it will free up parts of the valuable broadcast spectrum for public safety communications, such as those utilized by police and fire departments and other emergency personnel. Additionally, some of the spectrum will be auctioned to companies that will be able to provide consumers with more advanced wireless services.

Consumers will also benefit from this switch. As digital broadcasting allows television stations to offer improved picture and sound quality, as well as being much more spectrally-efficient than analog, television reception across the country will be improved. Also, through a process called "multicasting," broadcast stations will be able to offer several channels of digital programming simultaneously, using the same amount of spectrum for one analog program. For example, while a channel broadcasting in analog on Channel 4 is only able to offer one program, a station broadcasting in digital on Channel 4 can offer viewers one digital program on Channel 4-1, a second digital program on Channel 4-2, a third digital program on Channel 4-3, and so on. This means more programming choice for viewers.

**Action to be taken in advance of February 17, 2009**

So, what actions must a consumer take before the February 2009 date in order to continue to receive television broadcasts?

For those whose televisions are already connected to a cable or satellite company, or for those who have televisions with built-in digital tuners, nothing has to be done and the February 17 transition should be seamless. For those who may receive their programming on an analog television through a rooftop antenna, or "rabbit ears" as they are sometimes known, certain actions need to be taken in order to receive the digital broadcast.

There are three options available:

- connect the analog television to a converter box that will receive digital programming;
- connect the analog television to a paid service like cable or satellite; or
- purchase a television with a built-in digital tuner

If the converter box option is chosen, through a program run by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, every household can register to receive two coupons, each worth \$40, to help defray the cost of the convertor box. Most boxes cost between \$50 and \$70.

If the new television option is chosen, consumers should make sure the labeling and packaging state that the television has a built-in digital tuner. It should be noted that consumers need *not* buy a high-definition television (HDTV) to receive this digital picture.

### **Recent updates**

Next, I would like to inform the Committee about some important recent changes to the program.

As of October 20, 2008 a resident of a nursing home, intermediate care, or assisted living facility may apply for one conversion box coupon using his/her name and the name and address of the facility. Anyone may apply for a coupon on behalf of the resident, including a family member or employee of the facility. However, a facility cannot apply for a conversion box coupon for the common areas of the facility.

Additionally, as of October 20, 2008 persons who receive mail via PO Box may have the coupons sent to that box, but must also provide their physical residence address on the application form.

### **DoITT outreach**

While DTV Transition is a federally-mandated program, DoITT – along with our colleagues at DCA, DFTA, and at other agencies across the City – has been very active in apprising New Yorkers of the implications of the switch and we are pleased to brief the Committee on these efforts. Specifically, DoITT is utilizing its significant public-facing technology assets to educate the public about the transition. By phone, on-line and over the air, New Yorkers are being steadily informed about the transition.

As you know, DoITT administers the City's 311 Customer Service Center, a 24x7x365 government information and services hotline. In excess of 90% of the more than 40,000 calls the center receives daily are answered in 30 seconds or less, with translation services available in 180 languages. DoITT has provided scripts for 311's Call Center Representatives to inform callers about the transition, how to keep receiving television service if callers are affected by the switch, how to obtain the convertor box coupons, and links to the Federal government's websites on DTV Transition for further information. Additionally, our call center will be appropriately staffed and prepared for those calls coming in on February 18, the day after the transition, from callers wondering why they are not receiving a television signal.

The City's official website, *NYC.gov*, also administered by DoITT, has a prominent link to [www.dtv.gov](http://www.dtv.gov), as does the front page of the website for the City's noncommercial broadcast station, NYC TV (WNYE-TV/DT ("WNYE")) at [www.nyc.gov/tv](http://www.nyc.gov/tv). The City also has a web page within *NYC.gov* dedicated to educating the public about the DTV Transition. Web users searching for "DTV" on *NYC.gov*'s Google-licensed search function will find this dedicated page as the first page in the search result – which also links to the Federal government's websites. DoITT has also sent out two email blasts to City employees describing the transition.

NYC TV is also complying with the requirements of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to inform viewers of the upcoming transition. Accordingly, NYC TV is currently airing three or more Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and three or more text crawls in each of the following quarters of the day: 6:01am to 12:00pm; 12:01pm to 6:00pm; 6:01pm to 12:00am; and 12:01am to 6am – including at least one PSA and at least one crawl between 8:00pm and 11:00 pm every evening, traditional "prime time" viewing hours. Both the PSAs and crawls describe the transition, who may be affected by it, and what those affected viewers need to do to ensure they continue to receive television signals after February 17, 2009. NYC TV Channel 74 is also providing DTV text crawls.

On October 28, NYC TV and many other television stations in New York implemented a "soft shutdown" of their analog television signal from 5:58pm to 6:01pm. In this way, rather than normal programming, television sets relying on over-the-air analog signals for service showed a message that described the transition and directed them to an FCC hotline.

The City also recognizes that its seniors, lower-income residents, and persons with disabilities may be disproportionately impacted by the transition. As a result of its recent expansion to include comprehensive human services information and referral, 311 also has specially-trained call takers with expertise in dealing with matters specific to these populations. Additionally, DoITT is coordinating a number of initiatives with other City and State agencies that serve these populations, and many of these City agencies – two of whom you will be hearing from shortly – are conducting significant outreach efforts.

DoITT, through its Media and IT Counsel, David Berman, is also liaising with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, the New York City Housing Authority, Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Department of Small Business Services, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Council Member Brewer's Office to conduct outreach to residents. DoITT is also working with the New York City Department of Education to distribute pertinent information about the transition to all families in City's public school system and with the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit to distribute information to each of the City's 59 Community Boards.

Additionally, we have reached out to the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library and Queens Library systems, and over 40 non-government groups, to arrange for the distribution of materials about the DTV transition at their locations. DoITT has also participated in numerous community events about the transition including those involving visits by the U.S. House of Representatives and FCC Commissioners.

DoITT stands ready to supplement these efforts to educate as many segments of our affected population as possible. I thank you for inviting our testimony today, and you will now hear about the considerable efforts by some other City agencies in this regard.

Thank you.