

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 19, 2007

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

We are writing to express our concern about a proposal to place unlicensed, personal and portable devices on television channels. (OET Docket No. 04-186; 02-380.) The use of these devices now or in the future poses a risk of harmful interference that could permanently undermine over-the-air television in the United States. There is also cause for concern that these endeavors could interfere with the functionality of wireless microphones. Interference from personal and portable devices would also be particularly distressing to the millions of Americans who have recently purchased digital television sets or who will receive government subsidized digital-to-analog converter boxes to ready for the digital television transition. These consumers – already battling confusion over the digital television transition—may be left wondering why the switch left them unable to receive either an analog or a digital signal.

An analysis of the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) own data shows that digital television sets could receive interference from these unlicensed devices in 80 to 87% of a television station's coverage area. Moreover, the FCC's most recent report, released July 31, 2007, found that a prototype device that supposedly avoided interference by "sensing" the presence of TV signals did not perform particularly well. As you know, even a small amount of interference freezes a digital picture, making it unwatchable.

With millions of unlicensed devices potentially entering the market, interference may come from the apartment next door or from your neighbor down the street, but consumers will never know why their television sets do not work properly. Unlicensed device interference is impossible to police, and once the devices have flooded the market, they will be impossible to retrieve.

We fully support efforts to deliver the promise of broadband to rural America. We believe there are ways to utilize "unused" spectrum through fixed systems that can offer the advantages of broadband to rural consumers without threatening viewers who rely on over-the-air television.

Nearly 21 million homes – one in five of all television-equipped households – rely exclusively on free, over-the-air television broadcasts. A smooth digital transition is important to Congress, to the FCC and to the American people. Please consider that this could jeopardize the success of that transition by permanently undermining digital television.

Sincerely,

Sue Myrick

Sue Myrick
Member of Congress

Howard Coble

Howard Coble
Member of Congress

Robin Hayes

Robin Hayes
Member of Congress

Melvin L. Watt

Melvin L. Watt
Member of Congress

Mike McIntyre

Mike McIntyre
Member of Congress