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Chairman Towns Subpoenas Media Ratings Council for Arbitron Documents *Information reveals persistent underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic audiences*

Washington, DC – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) today announced a summary of findings after serving a subpoena to the Media Ratings Council for documents detailing its oversight of Arbitron’s use of the Personal People Meter (PPM). Chairman Towns issued the subpoena recently after Arbitron forbid MRC from releasing documents related to the Committee’s investigation of the PPM.

In June 2009, Chairman Towns opened an investigation into Arbitron’s use of the PPM amid allegations that methodological flaws with the device are resulting in the underrepresentation of radio listening preferences of minorities and certain age groups. The PPM is a device developed by Arbitron to measure radio station listenership.

Chairman Towns directed Committee investigators to meet with Arbitron’s representatives in early July 2009 after he received many complaints from minority broadcasters about the accuracy PPM data. Although Arbitron promised full cooperation with the investigation, the company immediately prohibited MRC from providing the Committee with any documents related to the PPM. Shortly thereafter, Arbitron provided the Committee with insufficient documents that were either publicly available or biased toward the company. Chairman Towns then chose to issue a subpoena to MRC for the PPM documents.

Among the key items uncovered in MRC’s documentation of the PPM:

- On multiple occasions, MRC refused to grant accreditation to PPM for use in all markets across the United States except for Houston and Riverside/San Bernardino. MRC denied Arbitron accreditation because of the company's continual failure meet MRC minimum accreditation standards.
- MRC found "persistent problems" with Arbitron's minority sample audiences across the country. For example, New York City 2008 census data indicates African Americans comprised 25 percent and Hispanics comprised 27 percent of the City's population. Meanwhile, the subpoenaed documents show that Arbitron's New York City sample audiences comprised of only 17.7 percent African-American and 21.5 percent Hispanic participants.
- The documents also show that Arbitron's radio ratings almost consistently are based on data they receive from an unacceptably low percentage of their sample audiences. For example, in New York, where there is an average of 5400 sample audience participants, Arbitron uses only the data submitted by 2700 persons or 50% of the sample audience in order to create radio station ratings. Therefore, the radio listening habits of over four million ethnic minorities are represented by only 500 Arbitron recruits. The sample audiences are simply an inadequate representation of the true listening habits of New York's diverse landscape.
- MRC found that Arbitron has made an insufficient effort to use bi-lingual interviews to recruit Spanish dominant Hispanic sample participants.

"Taken separately and together, these and other problems translate into a ratings disaster for minority-targeted radio stations. Until these items are corrected by Arbitron, the problem will only get worse," said Chairman Towns.

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