

For immediate release: Tuesday, November 24, 2009

Contact: Oversight and Government Reform Press Office, 202-225-5051

Chairman Towns Will Hold Hearing to Examine Minority Owned Radio Stations' Ratings Decline

Hearing to focus on Arbitron's Portable People Meter and its effect on diversity in radio broadcasting

Washington, DC – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) today announced that the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee is set to hold a hearing on Wednesday, December 2, 2009 to examine Arbitron's radio audience measurement device, the Portable People Meter (PPM), and its effect on diversity in radio broadcasting. Specifically, the Committee will examine whether the PPM technology and methodology accurately measure radio audiences and whether PPM has a disproportionately negative impact on radio stations owned by minorities or targeted toward minority listeners.

“With an unprecedented decline in ratings among popular minority television and radio stations, we must explore the possibility of methodological flaws in the implementation of the PPM,” said Chairman Towns. “As it stands now, the current system jeopardizes the future of minority broadcasting.”

The hearing will examine whether the PPM technology and methodology accurately measure radio audiences and look into the disproportionate impact PPM has had on radio stations owned by minorities or targeted toward minority listeners. Moreover, the Committee will address such factors as the effect of PPM as currency in a radio market; the importance of diversity in broadcast media; the impact of PPM on minority broadcasters and communities; and issues affecting sample quality in PPM technology.

As part of its monitoring protocol, Arbitron requires participants to carry the PPM. Since implementing this technology, minority broadcasters have expressed concerns with undercounting and underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic listeners. Chairman Towns opened an investigation in June 2009 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.

Chairman Towns served a subpoena to the Media Ratings Council (MRC) in September 2009 for documents detailing its oversight of Arbitron's use of the PPM, after Arbitron forbid MRC from releasing documents related to the Committee's investigation. Although Arbitron promised full cooperation with the investigation, the company prohibited MRC from providing the Committee with any documents related to the PPM. Furthermore, Arbitron provided the Committee with insufficient documents that were either publicly available or biased toward the company. The combination of the actions by Arbitron prompted the Chairman to issue a

subpoena to MRC for the PPM documents.

“I remain deeply concerned that increased use of the PPM may unfairly threaten the financial viability of minority targeted radio stations whose advertising revenues depend on the size of their rated audience,” said Chairman Towns. “In addition, there is a serious risk that certain groups of minority listeners will continue to be undercounted, imperiling minority audience radio stations and decreasing the diversity of opinions in radio broadcasting.”

###