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July 23, 2009

Mr. Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
United States Government
Accountability Office
441 G St. NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We are writing to you to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study on the use of the Portable People Meter (PPM) by Arbitron and its effect on advertising revenue streams for radio stations. During the past two years, Arbitron has employed the PPM system within certain markets to measure and describe radio station audiences. While we understand that Arbitron is attempting to accurately account for all listenership, we want to ensure that the use of the PPM is in fact counting all populations accurately.

Audience rating services have a significant impact on the pricing agreements that advertisers and radio stations negotiate. Minority-owned companies have raised particular concerns regarding the PPM system, claiming that the methodology and data samples contain flaws that compromise the validity of the data. Because advertising revenues depend so directly on audience ratings data, an accurate and valid system is critical to the fiscal solvency of radio stations.

We write to request that the GAO conduct a detailed analysis of Arbitron's share of the terrestrial radio station ratings system marketplace, the methodology behind the company's PPM and its survey samples, how the PPM system has affected radio station advertising revenues, and:

(1) Whether the survey samples adequately account for young African American, Hispanic, and other minority listeners;
(2) Whether the survey samples adequately account for cell phone-only households;
(3) Whether the survey samples adequately account for non-English speaking people;
(4) Whether the survey samples sufficiently approximate geographic granularity, as well as income and country of origin data.

Because certain federal agencies, such as the Federal Communications Commission, rely upon Arbitron data in developing and implementing its regulations, review of Arbitron's methodology is an appropriate task for the GAO to ensure its reliability for federal regulatory use.

If the Committee can be helpful in acquiring the necessary information and data from the Arbitron company, please do not hesitate to contact us or our staffs. The Committee on the Judiciary can be reached at (202) 225-3951. We would request that this study be completed by the end of April 2010 and would appreciate updates as to its progress during the interim.

Sincerely,

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Rick Boucher
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Linda Sánchez
Member of Congress

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