

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 14, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley More Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education & Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

Thank you for the Committee's bipartisan leadership in providing resources to support local public broadcast stations through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Ready To Learn program, and public media's interconnection system.

As you consider the FY 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we urge you to continue to provide healthy funding for these programs that are essential to the public media system and the communities they serve. This funding supports investments in education, public safety, and civic leadership services that all stations are uniquely positioned to provide. To meet these needs, we request \$595 million, for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's (CPB) two-year advance appropriation in FY 2027. We also request level funding of \$31 million for the Ready To Learn program. Finally, we request level funding of \$60 million for public broadcasting interconnection to ensure CPB can continue to support public radio and public television broadcast and digital distribution services while enabling CPB to make important system-wide digital infrastructure and technology upgrades and investments.

We also urge the Committee's inclusion of the attached report language to reemphasize the importance of objectivity and balance and diversity of thought throughout public broadcasting and public broadcasting's commitment to those guiding principles.

Federal investment in these programs is crucial to providing education, public safety, civic leadership services and news, information and community programming to all Americans. These services have helped more than three generations of Americans learn to read, while also improving the math and literacy skills of many children living in high-need areas across the country. Local public broadcasting stations play a critical role in alerting, warning, and providing local information during disasters and other crises. Public media is successfully providing trusted local journalism, information, and cultural programming to all corners of our country, including many parts that are underserved and unprofitable for traditional media sources.

For every federal dollar invested into public broadcasting, local stations raise an average of six matching dollars. This highly successful public-private partnership has provided the necessary

revenue to serve the needs of communities across the nation. Today, more than 70 percent of the funds appropriated to CPB go directly to more than 1,550 independently licensed and controlled public television and radio stations. These stations support approximately 20,000 media jobs nationwide.

In rural areas, where public broadcasting stations can be the only source of free, high-quality local programming, news and public safety information available to families, CPB funding can amount to nearly half of some rural stations' budgets or more. This gap cannot be closed by increased underwriting revenue or donor support.

Public safety is an often over-looked pillar of public broadcasting's mission that public broadcasters have embraced. Today, the combined strength of local public radio and television broadcast signals can reach 99 percent of the American population and play a critical role in providing local and national information to the public during emergencies – even when the Internet, cell service, and power grids are offline. In times of national emergency, public broadcasters have actively participated in the presidential alerting system. Federal funding is supporting implementation of MetaPub technology, so public radio listeners can see synchronized text and image alerts, such as tornado and hurricane warnings, evacuation routes, in real time on their mobile phones, HD radios, “connected car” dashboards, and online streams. Public television stations are also providing critical redundancy to the nation's Wireless Emergency Alert system by sending geotargeted messages from FEMA to cellular carriers via PBS WARN (Warning, Alert, and Response Network).

Many public broadcast stations are also effectively assisting state and local public safety, law enforcement and first responder organizations. By connecting these agencies with one another and the public via datacasting, first responders are now able to use broadcast spectrum to send critical information and video during times of crisis. Several recent datacasting pilots conducted by the Department of Homeland Security, in conjunction with public television stations, have demonstrated the ability of this encrypted one-to-many broadcast technology to help address the communications challenges facing the public safety community.

Public media is committed to providing education services to all Americans. Public broadcasting allows people at all income levels and from all parts of the country—rural and urban—to have access to consistent, high-quality, educational content for free. This educational programming is readily available to children, parents, teachers, senior citizens, those pursuing their high school equivalency degrees, and many others, helping America compete in the 21st century.

Public broadcasting has continued to make significant contributions to children's education through the Ready To Learn program. More than 110 research and evaluation studies have shown that Ready To Learn literacy and math content helps build and enhance the early literacy and math skills for children ages two to eight, particularly those living in high-need areas. For the majority of American children (52% in 2021) who do not have the means or opportunity to attend preschool, Ready To Learn content has provided an essential "school readiness"

experience.

We are requesting level funding of \$31 million to continue the impact of Ready to Learn created content and the scope of local station outreach to the kids, families, teachers, and schools that need it most.

Our public broadcasting system is a unique American institution that strengthens our local communities and enables all Americans to have free locally produced, educational programming as well as in-depth reporting and public service journalism. Public broadcasting offers original content with local and regionally specific coverage of issues that no one else provides.

In all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories, public media stations provide high quality, trusted, local and national news and information across broadcast and digital platforms. Public media provides an essential service to local communities and serves as a lifeline for rural and underserved Americans and those seeking reliable information during crises.

Public broadcasters have retained the trust of the American people in the comprehensive, transparent, objective and civil coverage of news and public affairs, serving as essential resources for a well-informed citizenry. Whether it is a state high school athletic tournament, public access to sessions of a State Legislature, or debate coverage of a local election, public broadcasting keeps America's communities informed.

These vital services depend on public broadcasting's interconnection system. The radio and television interconnection systems are the technological infrastructure and supporting operations that connect local public media stations across the country, provide access to programming from national, regional and independent content providers, and enable stations' local live streaming on the PBS app and other platforms. The interconnection system also serves as the failsafe for presidential alerts and warnings and ensures that cellular customers can receive geo-targeted emergency alerts and warnings. Ongoing funding for the interconnection system will ensure that public broadcasting can continue to provide essential services to every corner of America, including the ability to provide highly reliable public safety services.

The interconnection account also supports important system-wide digital infrastructure to manage data, strengthen cybersecurity, and engage with audiences. We urge continued level funding of \$60 million in FY 2025 for public media interconnection to ensure public media's universal service via both broadcast and streaming, while also efficiently addressing growing digital needs in the system.

The longstanding practice of two-year advance appropriations for CPB, which was enacted by President Ford in 1976, allows stations the ability to maximize fundraising efforts to leverage the promise of federal dollars for local impact, ensuring the continuation of this strong public-private partnership. The two-year advance funding mechanism also gives stations critical lead-time needed to plan and produce high-quality programming with accompanying educational resources.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and we urge you to continue the investment in the nation's public broadcasting system by providing \$595 million in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's two-year advance as well as \$31 million for the Ready to Learn grant program and \$60 million for the public broadcasting interconnection system during the next fiscal year.

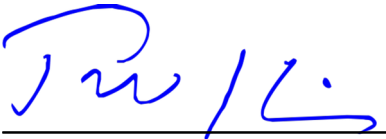
Sincerely,



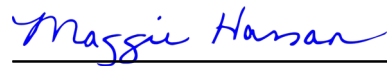
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



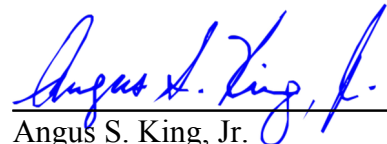
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



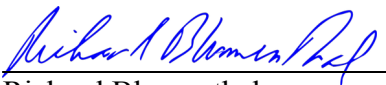
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



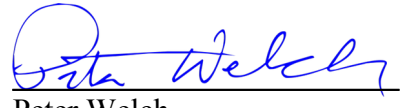
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



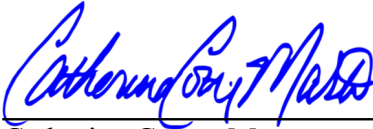
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



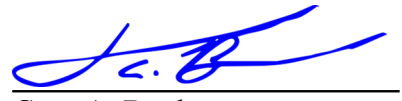
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



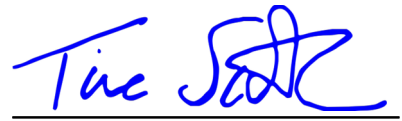
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



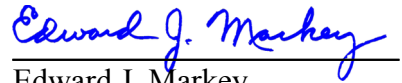
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



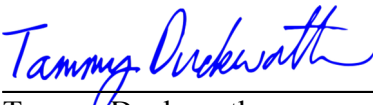
Tina Smith
United States Senator



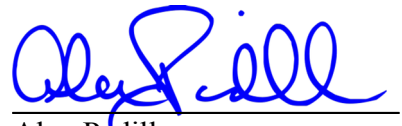
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator




Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



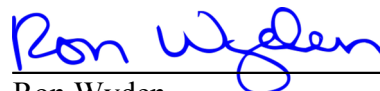
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



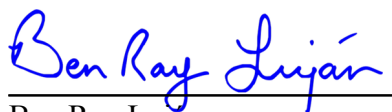
Ron Wyden
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Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



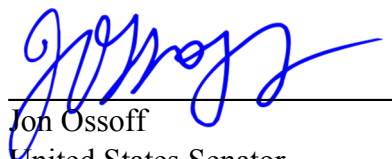
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



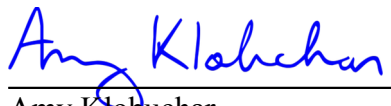
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



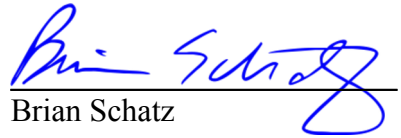
Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
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Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Raphaela Butler
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
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