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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
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SUBCOMMITTEE READINESS

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July 2, 2020

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20054

Dear Chairman Pai,

I write to request that you open an Low Power FM (LPFM) application window as soon as possible, consistent with application law and regulation, and publish public guidance on the process to establish a window so that radio owners and operators can have the information they need to plan their investments and the opportunity to establish new LPFM stations.

LPFM broadcast radio stations serve an important purpose in giving a platform to our small organizations, community leaders, local artists, educators, and ministries throughout rural America. First established in 2000, there are now more than 1,500 LPFM stations across the country.¹ In rural districts like mine, rural residents rely on community broadcasters operating on LPFM channels for crucial information about community events, as well as extreme weather events, natural disasters, and public health guidance—including throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

I appreciate that the FCC is currently working to improve service and create easier operating conditions for LPFMs across the country. This includes allowing these stations to use directional antennas, which allows for greater opportunities in border regions like those in my district.

However, these improved rules cannot have the greatest possible impact if there are no upcoming opportunities for providers to create new LPFMs in the near future. During the last LPFM application window, there were nearly 3,000 applicants, showing great demand for this service. That window was in 2013—there has been no further opportunity to license a new LPFM station over the past seven years.

¹ “Number of U.S. low-power FM radio stations has nearly doubled since 2014.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (September 19, 2016) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/19/number-of-u-s-low-power-fm-radio-stations-has-nearly-doubled-since-2014/#:~:text=More%20than%20750%20new%20low,the%20U.S.%20and%20its%20territories.>

I understand that the FCC must take great care in ensuring there is no interference between LPFM and regular FM stations, and thus the process of establishing new stations is a slow, intentional process. I also understand that it may take some time to fully establish the new rule changes established earlier this year. However, there is little transparency about the process to decide on a timeline for a new filing window period, and no indication of when the next one will be other than that the window will be announced “at least 30 days before the start of the filing period.” Without any other information, it is very difficult for community leaders and organizations to plan efforts to apply for a new station. They have no way of knowing when they will have the opportunity to apply with such limited public guidance available on the FCC’s process to establish a new filing window period.

Given the high demand for new LPFM stations, and the important function they serve across rural America, I urge the FCC to open a new LPFM application window as soon as the new rule changes are in place, consistent with applicable law and regulation. Additionally, I request that the FCC post public guidance with information on the process the FCC takes in setting up these windows so that interested parties have a better idea of when an opportunity will become available.

Thank you for your work to provide broadcasting opportunities to communities across the country. I look forward to working with you to uplift the voices of the community organizations, religious groups, educators, and local leaders that rely on LPFM stations. Please send a response to Brooke Stuedell at Brooke.Stuedell@mail.house.gov and Sophia Bock at Sophia.Bock@mail.house.gov at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Xochitl', written over a horizontal line.

Xochitl Torres Small
United States Representative