

September 1, 2022

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Federal Communications Commission  
Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel  
45 L Street NE  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairwoman Rosenworcel:

I am writing to express concerns that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed significantly increasing regulatory fees for broadcasters this year. Should this increase go into effect later this month, I am worried that the resulting strain on local, rural stations may mean that some may be forced to scale back their service, and some may be forced to shutter altogether.

Local broadcasting is a critical service and lifeline for West Virginians, and many local, rural stations in West Virginia are already operating on extremely tight budgets. Local broadcasters have provided crucial information over the past several years, keeping individuals and families connected to their communities and their country and providing critical public health information. And yet, few industries have been harder hit financially than local media due to the steep decline in advertising revenue. In many markets, the loss of advertising revenue from local businesses has exceeded 30 percent, and in some cases more than 50 percent. Unfortunately, many of these local media organizations struggled to receive assistance from the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Raising regulatory fees on this beleaguered industry could have disastrous impacts on local news across the country.

The discrepancy between the increase that is proposed to be levied on broadcasters, and the much smaller increases on other industries raises questions about the basic fairness and equity of the proposal itself. It is my understanding that the proposed increase in the share of regulatory fees for broadcasters would translate to approximately \$7.3 million more in fees, constituting the lion's share of the approximate \$7.95 million overall increase in the FCC budget. It appears that local, rural broadcasters are being asked to subsidize the regulation of other industries while receiving no corresponding increase or enhancement of the Commission's broadcaster-specific activities.

My understanding is that the FCC has enjoyed considerably more flexibility in the past to ameliorate such significant increases to individual industries than it enjoys today. I respectfully request that you use whatever flexibility you do have to work with me to find a solution that lessens the impact these fees would have on local, rural broadcasters in West Virginia and around the country this year and in the future. I would also welcome your suggestions for any

legislative or statutory changes that might help provide additional flexibility to address these issues in the future. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, which oversees the FCC's annual budget, I welcome the chance to work with you to find ways to ensure the FCC's budget through the Congressional spending process while also protecting the industries it serves.

I know we share a belief in the continued importance of broadcasting to local communities, particularly with regard to the critical local news and information they provide rural and underserved areas. I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that this service continues to serve the great State of West Virginia.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III