

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2025

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The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L St NE
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Carr,

We write to express our support for public broadcasting and its vital role in delivering quality educational and informational programs to local communities across the country. As members of the bipartisan Public Broadcasting Caucus (“Caucus”), we see firsthand the valuable services that public broadcasting provides for our districts and across the nation. These range from public safety information to local news, children’s educational content, and in-depth workforce training courses.

In January, you wrote to the presidents and chief executives of National Public Radio (“NPR”) and Public Broadcasting Service (“PBS”), signaling that you have asked the FCC’s Enforcement Bureau to open an investigation regarding underwriting practices at PBS, NPR, and their broadcast member stations. You also wrote that you personally “do not see a reason why Congress should continue sending taxpayer dollars to NPR and PBS given the changes in the media marketplace.”¹

We respectfully disagree that Congress should stop funding NPR and PBS. Since its founding almost 25 years ago, our Caucus reflects the longstanding bipartisan nature of public support for federal funding of public broadcasting. Today, this mission remains as critical as ever. More than half of U.S. counties have little to no locally based source of local news, and over 200 counties are news deserts.²

The vast majority of federal funding for public radio and television goes directly to individual stations, with Community Service Grants accounting for at least 25 percent of revenue for 120 rural stations (almost half of all rural grantees) and at least 50 percent for 33 rural stations.³ Stations are able to build on this federal investment to raise non-federal funds to help sustain their local broadcasting services, representing a return of over \$3.70 for every appropriated dollar for rural stations and about \$7 when also accounting for nonrural stations.⁴

Without federal support for public broadcasting, many localities would struggle to receive timely, reliable local news and educational content, particularly remote or rural communities that commercial newsrooms are less likely to invest in. In states such as Alaska, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Texas, rural public radio stations are

¹ Letter from FCC Chairman Brendan Carr to Katherine Maher, President and CEO of NPR, and Paula A. Kerger, President and CEO of PBS (Jan. 29, 2025),

² *Medill Report Shows Local News Deserts Expanding*, Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, Northwestern University, <https://www.medill.northwestern.edu/news/2024/medill-report-shows-local-news-deserts-expanding.html> (Oct. 23, 2024).

³ *CPB Support for Rural Stations*, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, <https://cpb.org/aboutpb/rural> (last visited Mar. 12, 2025)

⁴ *Id.*; *CPB FAQ*, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, <https://cpb.org/faq#1-3-2> (last visited Mar. 12, 2025)

often the *only* weekly or daily news source in their communities.⁵ Even in places with other daily or weekly news sources, those outlets may not be directing resources toward original or locally based stories, leaving it to public stations to fill the gap.

Additionally, public media plays an essential role in providing lifesaving information, including emergency alerts, in times of crisis. During Hurricanes Helene and Milton, even as many other news sources lost power and internet, Blue Ridge Public Radio remained online in the Asheville, North Carolina area and delivered hourly local updates and statements from public officials to the over 500,000 people impacted by power outages in the region.⁶ In Florida, a network of 14 public media stations across the state began coverage of Hurricane Helene a week before its major landfall, granting residents direct access to real-time weather alerts and updates across all platforms and apps.⁷ Similarly, during the 2017 Northern California Wildfires, local public radio outlets combined office space to streamline information released by public officials and maximize their ability to get essential public safety coverage across the region.⁸

Public broadcasting networks also support educational content that parents nationwide rely on to help their children learn, averaging 16 million monthly users and more than 350 million monthly streams across digital platforms.⁹ This is particularly true for low-income families, as PBS stations reach more children from those households than any of the children's cable television networks in one year.¹⁰ In 2025, PBS Kids was named the most educational media brand, with 63 percent of respondents voting for PBS Kids compared to other television or online platforms.¹¹ Local stations like PBS Reno offer a "Curiosity Classroom" service that provides free STEM, literacy-based workshops, specifically designed for Pre-K through fourth grade classrooms, to communities in northern Nevada and northeastern California.¹² It is little wonder that 90 percent of the parents surveyed said PBS Kids helps prepare children for success in school,¹³ and 82 percent of voters, including 72 percent of President Trump's voters, value PBS for its children's programming and educational tools.¹⁴

We must ensure that Americans continue to have access to important public broadcasting programs and services. This includes preserving public broadcast stations' federal funding and their longstanding, legitimate underwriting practices. In 1981, Congress specifically amended our public broadcasting rules to relax prior restrictions upon public broadcasters' fundraising activities, to ensure that public media could better leverage

⁵ Alliance of Rural Public Media, *Connecting America: The Essential Service of Rural Public Radio*, at 17 (Oct. 2022) ("ARPM Report").

⁶ *Public Media: A Lifeline for Communities During Historic Hurricanes*, Protect My Public Media (Nov. 19, 2024), <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/blog/2024/11/19/public-media-lifeline-hurricanes/>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Steve Mencher, *California Public Media Stations Band Together During California Fires*, Protect My Public Media (Nov. 21, 2017), <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/blog/2017/11/21/california-public-media-cover-fires/>.

⁹ PBS Trust Survey Flyer, PBS and YouGov, at 2 (Jan. 6-10, 2025), <http://bit.ly/3FIsRfI>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Curiosity Classroom*, PBS Reno, <https://www.pbsreno.org/education/curiosityclassroom/> (last visited March 12, 2025).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Sara Fischer, *PBS poll finds broad Trump voter support amid GOP defunding push*, Axios (Feb. 4, 2025), <https://www.axios.com/2025/02/04/pbs-on-the-offense>.

nongovernment funding as an exchange for reducing federal funding.¹⁵ It is critical that the FCC does not chill legitimate underwriting practices that are compliant with its underwriting rules. Our public media must be able to remain financially viable to provide critical news and educational information to their communities.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and request a briefing by April 4, 2025 on how the FCC plans to ensure that any investigation does not undercut public media's role in providing important services to their local communities.

Sincerely,



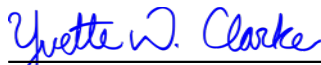
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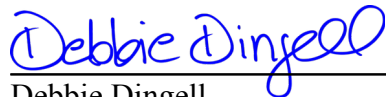
Andre Carson
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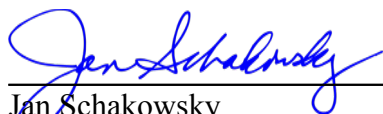
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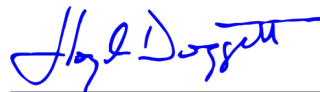
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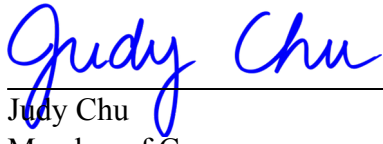


Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

¹⁵ *Commission Policy Concerning the Noncommercial Nature of Educational Broadcasting Stations*, Memorandum Opinion and Order, FCC 84-105, Docket No. 21136 at para. 1 (March 28, 1984).



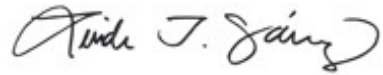
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Member of Congress



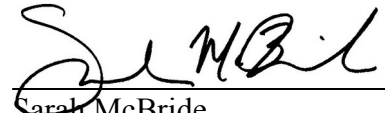
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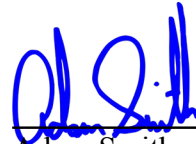
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