

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
& Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
& Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you consider the FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education & Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, we urge you to continue to support and increase funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) by providing \$495 million for CPB's two-year advance, \$30 million for the Department of Education's Ready To Learn program, and \$20 million for the Public Broadcasting Interconnection Systems.

The federal investment into these programs is crucial to providing education, public safety and civic leadership to all Americans. These services have helped over 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. Public media is successfully providing in-depth news, information, and cultural programming to many parts of our country that are underserved and unprofitable for traditional media sources.

For every federal dollar invested into public broadcasting, local stations raise an average of six dollars to match this. This highly successful public-private partnership has provided the necessary revenue to serve the needs of viewers across the nation. Today, approximately 70% of the funds appropriated to CPB go directly to the more than 1,500 independently licensed and controlled public television and radio stations. These stations also support approximately 20,000 media jobs in communities across the nation.

Public media has shown a strong commitment to educating and serving all Americans. Because of these efforts, innovative and educational programming is readily available to children, parents, teachers, senior citizens, those pursuing their general education degree and many others. Thus, Americans at all income levels have access to consistent, high-quality content, free of charge.

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. Approximately 14 million children viewed Ready To Learn content last year and nearly 8 million children experienced related interactive content and games via the internet, smartphones and whiteboards. For the 54% of American children who do not have the means nor opportunity to attend preschool, Ready To Learn content has provided an essential "school readiness" experience.

Public safety is another mission that public broadcasters have also embraced. In times of national emergency, public broadcasters have actively participated in the presidential alerting system. Today, the combined strength of local public radio and television broadcast signals can reach 99% of the American population. Public television stations are also providing critical redundancy through the Warning, Alert, and Response Network, by sending geo-targeted Wireless Emergency Alert messages from FEMA to cellular carriers.

Many broadcast stations are also effectively assisting state and local public safety, law enforcement and first responder organizations. By connecting these agencies with one another, the public, and with vital datacasting capabilities, 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 technology to help address the communications challenges facing the public safety community.

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

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.

This is especially true in rural areas where public broadcasting stations can be the only source of free, high-quality local programming available. Funding from CPB can amount to more than half of some rural stations' budgets, a gap that cannot be closed by increasing underwriting revenues or donor support.

All of the vital services mentioned depend on public broadcasting's interconnection system. This is the technological infrastructure and supporting operations that provide every local public media station across the country with access to programming from national, regional and independent content providers. Public broadcasting's public safety work also relies on interconnection as the failsafe for presidential alerts and warnings and ensures that cellular customers can receive geo-targeted emergency alerts and warnings.

For more than 20 years Congress has provided separate funding for public broadcasting's interconnection systems which are the backbone of public broadcasting. The needed updates of the public television and radio interconnection systems are now underway. This update represents an essential element of public broadcasting's continued public media service, including the ability to provide highly reliable public safety services. Thank you for your recognition of this important project and for the first few years of funding. Continued funding is needed in FY 2020 to proceed with the critical work that is now underway.

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 our investment in public broadcasting during the next fiscal year.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



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United States Senator



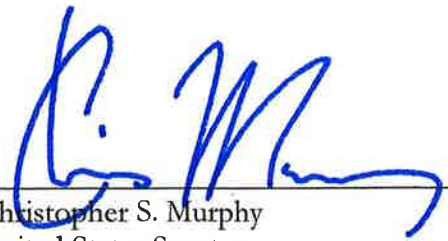
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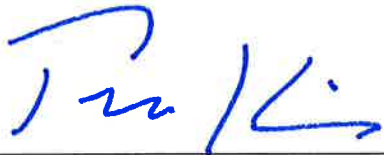
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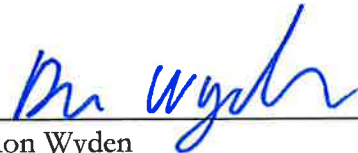
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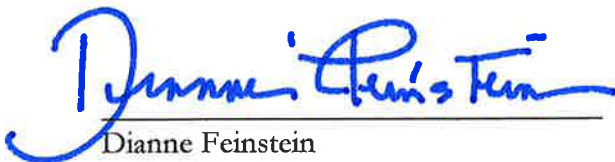
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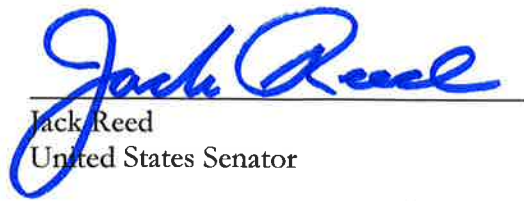
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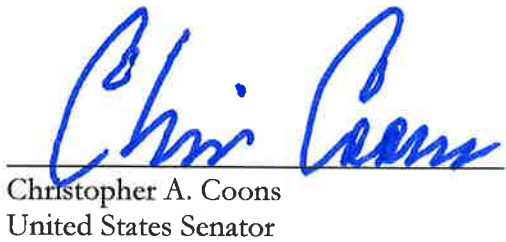
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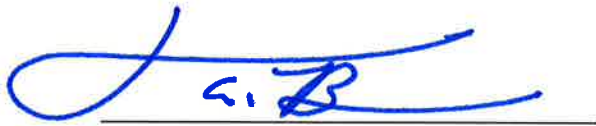

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

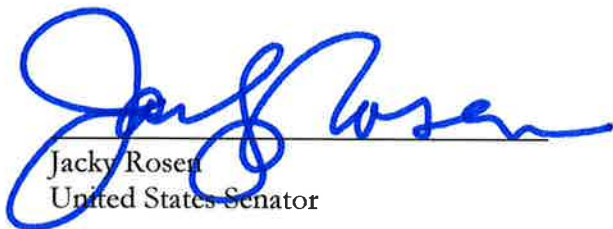

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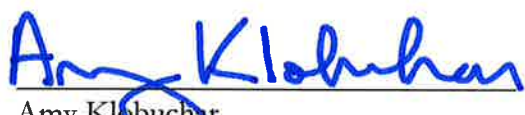

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