



**National Federation of Community Broadcasters
Submitted to the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriations for the
Public Telecommunications Facilities Program**

**Testimony of Carol Pierson
President and CEO
March 25, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this Subcommittee requesting a \$44 million appropriation for the Commerce Department's Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) in FY 2010. As the President and CEO of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB), I speak on behalf of 250 community radio stations and related individuals and organizations across the country including many Low Power FM stations. NFCB is the sole national organization representing this group of stations, which provide independent local service in the smallest communities and the largest metropolitan areas of this country. Nearly half of NFCB's members are rural stations, and half are controlled by people of color.

In summary, the points we wish to make to this Subcommittee are:

- Community Radio supports \$44 million in funding for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program in FY 2010.
- PTFP funding is unique. It is the only funding source available to help get new stations on the air and ensure that public broadcasting is available everywhere in the United States..
- PTFP will help public and community radio stations prepare to provide emergency information during natural or man-made disasters.
- PTFP will help fund for conversion of public radio and television to digital broadcasting.
- PTFP helps to bring public radio service to rural areas where it is not otherwise available, including support for the unprecedented number of new noncommercial community stations that will be being built over the next few years because of recent licensing opportunities at the FCC.
- PTFP is a targeted program carefully managed to replace necessary equipment by leveraging public with private funds.

Community Radio supports \$44 million in funding for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program in FY 2010. PTFP funding is unique. It is the only funding source available to help get new stations on the air and ensure that public broadcasting is available everywhere in the United States. Federal funding distributed through the PTFP is essential to continuing and expanding the public broadcasting service throughout the United States. PTFP funding is critical to ensuring public radio's readiness to provide life-saving information to communities in the event of local disasters, as we have seen during weather emergencies in the past few years. With the advent of digital broadcasting, PTFP funding is helping with the conversion to this new technology. It is particularly critical for rural stations and those serving low income communities. PTFP funds new stations, expanding the reach of public broadcasting to rural areas and to audiences that are not served by existing stations. Finally, it replaces obsolete and worn out equipment so that existing public stations can continue to broadcast high quality programming in a carefully targeted, fiscally responsible manner..

PTFP will help public and community radio stations prepare to provide emergency information during natural or man-made disasters. As we saw during the severe storms and devastating hurricanes of the last few years, radio is the most effective medium for informing a community of weather forecasts, traffic issues, services available, evacuations, and other emergency conditions. Since everyone has access to a radio and they are portable and battery operated, a radio is the first source for this critical information. Radio stations therefore must have emergency power at both their studios and their transmitter in order to provide this service.

We support \$44 million in funding to ensure that both the ongoing program will be continued, and hope that there will be additional financial resources available to help cover the cost of improving the emergency infrastructure of public broadcasting stations. This additional funding is considered an urgent need if community stations are to withstand and continue broadcasting through extreme weather or other emergency situations. At a time when local service is being abandoned by commercial radio, PTFP aids communities developing their own stations which provide local information and emergency notifications.

The National Federation of Community Broadcasters supports PTFP funding to help public radio to convert to digital to provide more public service and keep up with the market. While *television's* digital conversion is mandated by the Federal Communications Commission and the date is imminent *radio* is also converting to digital. Commercial radio stations are converting to digital transmission, and public radio should not be left behind. The digital standard for radio has been approved by the Federal Communications Commission, and over 400 public radio transmitters have been converted. Public digital radio signals will provide more public service. Most exciting to public radio is that stations can broadcast two or more high quality signals, even while they continue to provide the analog signal. Additional digital audio channels will potentially more than double the service that public radio can provide, particularly to unserved and underserved communities. For example, public radio will be able to add services in languages other than English, or will be able to add distinctive cultural, music, or news programming.

PTFP helps to bring public radio service to rural areas where it is not otherwise available, including support for the unprecedented number of new noncommercial community stations that will be being built over the next few years because of recent licensing opportunities at the FCC. Often PTFP funds translator stations to expand the geographic coverage of an existing station. Federal funding is particularly critical to stations broadcasting to rural and underserved audiences which have limited potential for fundraising due to sparse populations, limited number of local businesses, and low income levels. PTFP grants also help with the planning and equipment needs of a new station. Recently, many of these new projects have been for Native American controlled stations on Indian Reservations or Low Power FM installations that broadcast very locally. Over the next few years there will be new demand on PTFP funding to build new noncommercial stations across the country because the FCC opened a filing window for new noncommercial radio stations for the first time in ten years in Fall 2007.

PTFP is a targeted program carefully managed to replace necessary equipment by leveraging public with private funds. Funding from PTFP has been essential to keep public radio stations on the air by funding the replacement of equipment, often items that have been in use for 20 or more years. The program is administered carefully to be certain that stations are acquiring the most appropriate type of equipment. They also determine that equipment is being properly maintained and will not fund the replacement of equipment before an appropriate period of time in use. Even so, PTFP funding is a matching program, so federal money is leveraged with a local commitment of funds. This program is a strong motivating factor in raising the significant money necessary to replace, upgrade and purchase expensive broadcast equipment.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. If the Subcommittee has any questions or needs to follow up on any of the points expressed above, please contact:

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The **NFCB** is a thirty-three-year-old grassroots organization which was established by, and continues to be supported by, our member stations. Large and small, rural and urban, NFCB member stations are distinguished by their commitment to local programming, community participation and community support. NFCB's 250 members come from across the United States, from Alaska to Florida, from every major market to the smallest Native American reservation. While urban member stations provide alternative programming to communities that include New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and other major markets, rural

members are often the sole source of local and national daily news and information in their communities. NFCB's membership reflects the true diversity of the American population: 41% of members serve rural communities, and 46% are radio services controlled by people of color.

On Community Radio stations' airwaves examples of localism abound: on KWSO in Warm Springs, Oregon, you will hear morning drive programs in the Native language of that community; throughout the California farming areas in the central valley, Radio Bilingüe programs six stations targeting low-income farm workers; in Chevak, Alaska, on KCUK you will hear the local weather reports and public service announcements in Cup'ik/Yup'ik Eskimo; in Dunmore, West Virginia, you will hear coverage of the local school board and county commission meetings; KABR in Alamo, New Mexico serves its small isolated Native American population with programming almost exclusively in Navajo; and on WWOZ you can hear the sounds and culture of New Orleans throughout the day and night.

In 1949 the first Community Radio station went on the air. From that day forward, Community Radio stations have been reliant on their local community for support. PTFP funding is a critical source of matching funds for these essential community resources.