



**National Federation of Community Broadcasters
Submitted to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2011 Appropriations for the
Public Telecommunications Facilities Program**

**Testimony of Maxie C. Jackson, III
President and CEO**

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this Subcommittee in support of \$44 million in funding for the Commerce Department's Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) in FY 2011. 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:

- 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.
- In the current budget, a loss of PTFP will mean an irreplaceable loss in new community radio stations because of an unprecedented number of new licensees in the pipeline flowing from a large number of radio stations granted new construction permits by the Federal Communications Commission. *This new licensing opportunity will not come again.*
- PTFP is a targeted program carefully managed to replace necessary equipment by leveraging public with private funds.
- 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 to digital broadcasting, which has only recently begun.

PTFP is poised to fund new stations that have recently been granted construction permits by the Federal Communications Commission. PTFP is the only program available that supports new station construction. No alternate funding exists--the Corporation for Public Broadcasting does not support stations until they have been on the air for one year. The solid funding levels for CPB will not translate into production of new stations. The opportunity in this budget year is unique because of its timing. In 2007, the Federal Communications Commission opened up a new licensing window for new noncommercial radio stations. This was the first opportunity to apply for new radio stations in a decade. Because of the scarcity of radio spectrum, this is the last significant licensing windows for new public radio stations unless new spectrum is allocated to radio broadcasting. Community radio has put an immense effort into recruiting new and diverse applicants who are just now receiving their construction permits from the FCC and are able to apply for PTFP funding. With adequate funding and support, the new group of applicants has the potential to fund construction of 45 new community radio stations authorized by the FCC in its most recent licensing window and double the number of Native American radio stations in this country. 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. In addition, PTFP often funds translator stations to expand the geographic coverage of an existing station.

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.

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 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 was completed last year, *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.

In sum, community radio supports \$44 million in funding for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program in FY 2011. 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.

Public radio is the most vibrant part of the radio dial, bringing a diverse spectrum of news, information and entertainment to millions of listeners every day. PTFP will give us an unprecedented opportunity to be sure that radio is providing local news and journalism, enhancing local culture, and bringing new communities into the information age.

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.