



**National Federation of Community Broadcasters Testimony to the  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations  
for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting  
Encompassed in the Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriation Legislation**

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this Subcommittee regarding the appropriation for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). 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. Nearly half our members are rural stations and half are controlled by people of color. In addition, our members include many Low Power FM stations that are putting new local voices on the airwaves. NFCB is the sole national organization representing this group of stations which provide independent, local service in the smallest communities of this country as well as the largest metropolitan areas.

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

- Requests \$542 million in funding for CPB for FY 2012;
- Supports a \$307 million supplemental appropriation in FY 2010 to ensure that public broadcasting is not lost to any parts of the country because of the economic crisis;
- Requests \$40 million in FY 2010 for conversion of public radio and television to digital broadcasting;
- Requests \$27 million in FY 2010 for replacement of the radio interconnection system;
- Requests that advance funding for CPB is maintained to preserve journalistic integrity and facilitate planning and local fundraising by public broadcasters;
- Supports CPB activities in facilitating programming and services to Native American, African American and Latino radio stations;
- Supports CPB's efforts to help public radio stations utilize new distribution technologies and requests that the Subcommittee ensure that these technologies are available to all public radio services and not just the ones with the greatest resources.

**Community Radio fully supports the appropriation of \$542 million in federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in Fiscal Year 2012.** Federal support distributed through CPB is an essential resource for rural stations and for those serving communities of color. These stations provide critical, life-saving information to their listeners and are often in communities with very small populations and limited economic bases, thus the community is unable to financially support the station without federal funds. For example, these stations offer programming in languages other than English or Spanish, they can offer emergency information targeted for a particular geographic area, and can offer in-depth programming on public health issues.

In larger towns and cities, sustaining grants from CPB enable Community Radio stations to provide a reliable source of noncommercial programming about the communities themselves. Local programming is an increasingly rare commodity in a nation that is dominated by national program services and concentrated ownership of the media. Federal funding allows an alternative to exist in these larger markets. And with large newspaper shedding journalists, local community radio may be one of the only outlets able to pick up the slack in coverage of local political matters.

For over 30 years, CPB appropriations have been enacted two years in advance. This insulation has allowed public broadcasting to grow into a respected, independent, national resource that leverages its federal support with significant local funds. Knowing what funding will be available in advance has allowed local stations to plan for programming and community service and to explore additional non-governmental support to augment the federal funds. Most important, the insulation that advance funding provides “go[es] a long way toward eliminating both the risk of and the appearance of undue interference with and control of public broadcasting.” (*House Report 94-245.*)

For the past few years, CPB has increased support to rural stations and committed resources to help public radio take advantage of new technologies such as the internet, satellite radio and digital broadcasting. We support these new technologies we can better serve the American people, but want to ensure that smaller stations with more limited resources are not left behind in this technological transition. We ask that the Subcommittee include language in the appropriation that will ensure that funds are available to help the entire public radio system, particularly rural and minority stations, utilize new technology.

NFCB commends CPB for the leadership it has shown in supporting and fostering programming services to Latino stations and Native American stations. For example, Satélite Radio Bilingüe provides 24 hours of programming to stations across the United States and Puerto Rico addressing issues of particular interest to the Latino population in Spanish and English. At the same time, Native Voice One (NV1) is distributing politically and culturally relevant programming to Native American stations. There are now over 33 stations in the U.S. controlled by and serving Native Americans.

Five years ago, CPB funded the establishment of the Center for Native American Public Radio (CNAPR). After four years in operation, CNAPR has assisted with the renewal of licenses and expansion of the interconnection system to all Native stations and has advanced the opportunity for Native Nations to own their own, locally controlled station. In the process of this work, it was recognized that radio would not be available to all Native Nations and broadband and other new technologies would be necessary. CNAPR has been repositioned as Native Public Media (NPM) and is working hard to double the number of Native stations within the next three

years. These stations are critical in serving local, isolated communities (all but one are on Indian Reservations) and in preserving cultures that are in danger of being lost. CPB's 2003 assessment recognized that "...Native Radio faces enormous challenges and operates in very difficult environments." CPB funding is critical to these rural, minority stations. The funding of the Intertribal Native Radio Summit by CPB in 2001 helped to gather these isolated stations together into a system of stations that can support one another. The CPB assessment goes on to say "Nevertheless, the Native Radio system is relatively new, fragile and still needs help building its capacity at this time in its development." NPM promises to leverage additional new funding to ensure that these stations continue providing essential services to their communities.

CPB also funded a Summit for Latino Public Radio which took place in September 2002 in Rohnert Park, California, home of the first Latino public radio station. This year, CPB has provided funding to the Latino Public Radio Consortium to develop a Strategic Plan and Business Model to expand the service of public radio to the Latino population. The Latino population is growing in this country and requires news services geared toward them in order to fully participate in civic life. Hispanics were 12.5 percent of the population in 2000, by 2007 they were 15 percent, and the number is only growing.<sup>1</sup>

CPB plays an extremely important role in the public and Community Radio system: They convene discussions on critical issues facing us as a system. They support research so that we have a better understanding of how we are serving listeners. And, they provide funding for programming, new ventures, expansion to new audiences, and projects that improve the efficiency of the system. This is particularly important at a time when there are so many changes in the radio and media environment with media consolidation and new distribution technologies.

**Community Radio supports a \$307 million supplemental appropriation in FY 2010 to ensure that public broadcasting is not lost to any parts of the country because of the economic crisis.** Public Broadcasting is requesting a one-time investment of federal resources to help stations maintain local service and assist their communities cope with the economic crisis and to assure continuity of public broadcasting service to the American people. Financial contributions from corporations, foundations, institutions are down dramatically and listeners contributions, the main source of funding for Community Radio are beginning to be impacted by the growing unemployment. Community stations are critical sources of local information and it is essential that they be able to continue to provide their unique local service.

**Community Radio supports \$40 million in FY 2010 for the conversion to digital broadcasting by public radio and television.** While public television's digital conversion needs are mandated by the FCC, public radio is converting to digital to provide more public service and to keep up with commercial radio. The Federal Communications Commission has approved a standard for digital radio transmission that will allow multicasting. CPB has provided funding for more than 650 radio transmitters to convert to digital. Of those, 160 are multicasting two or more streams of programming. The development of second and third audio channels will potentially double or triple the service that public radio can provide listeners, particularly in un-served and underserved communities. However, this initial funding still leaves nearly 200 radio transmitters that must ultimately convert to digital or become obsolete.

**Community Radio strongly supports \$27 million in FY 2009 for the public radio interconnection system.** Public radio pioneered the use of satellite technology to distribute

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2007.

programming. The Public Radio Satellite System's recently-launched ContentDepot continues this tradition of cutting edge technology. Satellite capacity supporting it must be renewed and upgrades are necessary at the station and network operations levels. Interconnection is vital to the delivery of the high-quality programming that public broadcasting provides to the American people. This is the last year of a three-year request for \$80 million to the complete the project.

We are in a period of tremendous change. "Radio is well on its way to becoming something altogether new — a medium called audio."<sup>2</sup> The digital movement is transforming the way we do things; new distribution avenues like digital satellite broadcasting and the internet are changing how we define our business; and, the concentration of ownership in commercial radio makes public radio in general, and Community Radio in particular, more important as a local voice than we have ever been. New Low Power FM stations are providing local voices in their communities an avenue of expression, and many new community stations will be going on the air within the next few years. Community Radio is providing essential local emergency information, programming about the local impact of major global events taking place, and culturally-relevant information and entertainment in native languages, as well as helping to preserve cultures that are in danger of dying out. During the natural disasters of recent years, radio proved once again that it is the most dependable and available medium for getting emergency information to the public.

During these challenging times, the role of CPB as a convener of the system becomes even more important. The funding that it provides will allow smaller stations to participate alongside larger stations that have more resources as we move into a new era of communications.

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

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The **NFCB** is a 33-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

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<sup>2</sup> The State of the News Media, Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008.

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.