

National Federation of Community Broadcasters
Submitted to the
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Science, and Related Agencies
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations for the
Public Telecommunications Facilities Program

Testimony of Carol Pierson
President and CEO
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this Subcommittee requesting a \$30 million appropriation for the Commerce Department's Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP) in FY 2007. As the President and CEO of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, I speak on behalf of 250 community radio stations and related organizations across the country including many of the new Low Power FM stations. NFCB is the sole national organization representing this group of stations, which provide independent local service in both the smallest communities and 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 that NFCB:

- Supports funding for PTFP that will cover the on-going needs of public radio and television stations.
- Supports funding for conversion of public radio and television to digital broadcasting.
- Supports funding to help public and community radio stations prepare to provide emergency information during natural or manmade disasters.
- Supports restoration of administrative funding for the program which was cut in FY 2005.

Community Radio supports \$30 million in funding for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program in FY 2008. Federal support distributed through the PTFP is essential to continuing and expanding the public broadcasting service throughout the United States. It is particularly critical for rural stations and for those stations 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. In addition, it replaces obsolete and worn out equipment so that the existing public stations can continue to broadcast high quality programming. PTFP funding is critical to ensuring public radios' readiness to provide life-saving information in case of local disasters, as we have seen during the weather emergencies the last few

years. Finally, with the advent of digital broadcasting, PTFP funding is helping with the conversion to this new technology.

We support \$30 million in funding to ensure that both the on-going program—currently funded in FY 2007 at \$21.8 million—will be continued, and that the increase to \$30 million will be available to help cover the cost of improving the emergency infrastructure of public broadcasting stations. This increase in funding is an urgent need in order for stations to withstand and broadcast through extreme weather or other emergency situations. In addition, increased funding is needed to assist the conversion of public radio and television to digital. This is particularly important because the FCC has endorsed a standard for digital radio broadcasting, the television conversion deadline is imminent, and commercial radio stations are converting to digital transmission and public radio should not be left behind.

PTFP funding is unique. It is the only source of funding available to help get new stations on the air and to ensure that public broadcasting is available everywhere in the United States. At a time when local service is being abandoned by commercial radio, PTFP aids communities to develop their own local stations which provide local information and emergency notifications.

Funding from PTFP has been essential to keep public radio stations on the air by funding replacement of equipment, often after 20 or more years of use. The program is administered carefully to be sure 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 length of time. PTFP has also helped bring public radio service to rural areas where it is not available. Often they fund translators to expand the coverage of an existing station and they 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 new local Low Power FM installations.

Federal funding is particularly critical to stations serving rural and underserved audiences which have limited potential for fundraising because of sparse populations, limited number of local businesses, and low income levels. 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.

Community Radio stations need to be prepared to provide continuing service during emergency situations. As we saw during the hurricanes and severe weather the last couple of years, radio is the most effective medium of communication about evacuations, weather forecasts, traffic, services available, etc. Since everyone has radios and they are portable and battery operated, a radio is the first source of this critical information. But stations must have emergency power at both the studios and the transmitter in order to provide this service.

Community Radio supports funding for conversion to digital broadcasting for public radio and television. While public television's digital conversion is mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, public radio is converting to digital to provide more public service and to keep up with the market. The digital standard for radio has been approved and over 300 public radio transmitters have been converted. 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. The development of additional digital audio channels will potentially more than double the public service that public radio can provide, particularly to unserved and underserved communities.

Community Radio supports additional administrative funding for the PTFP. While we thank the Senate for continuing funding of PTFP, financial support for the skilled dedicated staff who administer these funds was cut nearly in half in FY 05. Restoration of administrative funds to the earlier level will assure that the program will be carefully and thoroughly administered.

Over the last few years, the number of administrative staff for the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program has been decreased. With fewer Program Officers there is less support for applicants or outreach about the program and reduced administrative funding hurts the review process. NFCB supports the restoration of these funds.

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-one-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 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, Minneapolis, San Francisco 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 their Native language; throughout the

California farming areas in the central valley, Radio Bilingüe programs five 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.