

Statement of Patricia de Stacy Harrison
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Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Britt, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of America's public media service —1,207 public radio stations and 357 public television stations that together reach nearly 99 percent of the American people. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) requests level funding of \$56 million in FY 2024 for the Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Federal Assistance Grants account. CPB is grateful for the strong funding support of this grant program in FY 2023. Sustained support will reinforce and extend public media's contributions to public safety and enhance alerting and early warning capabilities that benefit all Americans.

The public media system occupies a unique place in America providing local news, educational programming, and community resources to nearly every American. Because they reach more than any other media outlet, public television and radio stations have long served as an integral part of our nation's emergency alert system. The partnerships among emergency management officials, PBS, NPR, and local stations enable stations to provide encrypted, geotargeted alerts at the national, state, regional and local community level. Specifically, these partnerships include FEMA, tribal governments, state emergency management agencies, local emergency public safety officials, local and state health agencies, and Regional Bureau of Indian Affairs offices.

In times of disaster and uncertainty, the public media system is the best way to reach underserved Americans who lack reliable access to other forms of mass communication. In rural and remote areas, public media is often the only source of local news and public safety information, and native-owned public media stations serve some of the most remote and least connected areas in the nation.

The public television interconnection system serves as a distribution point for PBS WARN, an essential part of FEMA's nationwide Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system. Between January 1, 2022, and January 1, 2023, nearly 9,000 WEAs were issued by state and local authorities and transmitted over the PBS WARN system throughout the country – a 27 percent increase over the same period from the year before, demonstrating the growing utility of this life-saving technology.

PBS leverages its contributions to the WEA system through its "Eyes on IPAWS" tool, providing public safety officials with increased transparency of issued alerts. PBS also developed warn.pbs.org, a website that displays active alerts across the country with the ability to filter alerts based on alert type, location, and keyword searches and a look-back feature for expired and cancelled alerts. Emergency managers use these tools daily to identify active WEAs nationwide; confirm transmission, coverage area, and content of issued WEAs; gain awareness of WEAs issued by other agencies; view alerts based on location, alert type, or date; and analyze

the impact of WEAs in after-action analysis. The FCC's Communications, Security, Reliability, and Interoperability Council's (CSRIC) VII Report in 2020 recognized the value of this service.”

Similar to the public television interconnection system, the Public Radio Satellite System®(PRSS), managed by NPR, supports secure, reliable communications during emergencies without relying on the Internet, which may be offline during emergencies. PRSS receives a national EAS feed directly from FEMA and distributes Presidential emergency alerts to 1,247 public radio stations nationwide, including NPR member and non-member stations. With support from CPB, NPR has been helping public radio stations implement MetaPub technology so that stations can send text and image metadata simultaneously with their live radio broadcasts. For example, WWNO-FM in New Orleans is MetaPub enabled and links to the NOAA/NWS forecast stream so that local station weather reports can appear across screens. When Hurricane Ida took down the power grid and knocked many commercial radio stations off the air in August 2021, WWNO remained one of the few stations left to broadcast vital information in New Orleans.

Further, many stations serve as their states' primary Emergency Alert Service hub for weather and AMBER alerts. For example, Alabama Public Television's microwave system serves as the backbone of Alabama's Emergency Alert System, distributing national, state, and local emergency broadcast signals to all radio and television broadcasters throughout the state. APT is also the hub for Alabama's AMBER Alert to track missing children. In Ohio, the state's 12 public television stations partner to form the Ohio Emergency Alert System, which delivers a single data stream with all emergency messaging and severe weather information.

A \$56 million appropriation for the NGWS grant program would support the much-needed maintenance and replacement of public media's transmission infrastructure. In 2017, CPB commissioned a comprehensive System Technology Assessment to better understand public media stations' technology needs. The station response catalogued more than 60,000 pieces of equipment throughout the system. The assessment found that if equipment needs and available funds progress as forecasted, there would be a more than a \$300 million shortfall by 2020.

Since the time of the assessment, the financial challenges that stations face in meeting their equipment needs have only grown. If resources are not devoted to maintaining and replacing broadcast transmission infrastructure, TV and radio licensees of all sizes and types could face operating challenges nationwide, disrupting essential public safety services and partnerships.

Continued support for the NGWS will enable public media to develop a more and secure public alerting system. Under the competitive grant program, CPB stations that qualify for a community service grant from CPB can procure, construct, and improve transmission and other public safety-related equipment, software, and services, including ATSC 3.0 and comparable digital broadcast technology for radio stations. Specifically, the \$56 million in NGWS grant funds will enable public media stations to 1) expand the delivery and distribution of emergency alert messages from IPAWS to fill gaps in alert and warning delivery in underserved areas; 2) enable the communication of alerts and warnings to individuals with disabilities, individuals with

access and functional needs, and individuals with limited English proficiency; 3) enhance capacity of local public broadcast stations to receive, broadcast, and redistribute emergency alert messages using the IPAWS Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) specifications; 4) upgrade stations' transmission equipment to next-generation ATSC 3.0 broadcast standards; and 5) enhance technology infrastructure to enable new, enhanced broadcast services that improve the distribution of public alerts and warnings and strengthen infrastructure resilience with emergency generators and other equipment. The NGWS grant program, administered under FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) department, will ensure consistency with the recommendations in the Modernizing the Nation's Public Alert and Warning System report from the FEMA National Advisory Council, issued in February 2019.

Public media infrastructure serves as an essential part of our nation's emergency alert system. With support from this subcommittee and this Congress, it can continue to play a reliable role in providing timely, accurate, life-saving alerts. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Britt, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me, on behalf of America's public media system, to submit this testimony. I appreciate your consideration of CPB's funding request.