

**Statement of Patricia de Stacy Harrison
President and CEO, Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Senate Committee on Appropriations
June 9, 2021**

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Capito and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of America's public media service — 1,500 public television and radio stations reaching 99 percent of the American people. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) requests \$20 million in FY 2022 for a newly created Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This funding will reinforce and extend public media's contributions to public safety and result in enhanced alerting and warning capabilities that benefit all Americans.

Through local public television and radio stations, public media offers educational programming designed to support at-home learning, local journalism that gives Americans the information they need to respond to the world around them, and content that helps us better understand our history and each other. Public media's services proved to be critical over the past year as people sought up-to-date, fact-based information about COVID-19. Stations responded with broadcasts featuring local officials, online dashboards and visualizations tracking the pandemic, podcasts with local health experts explaining the virus, and public safety announcements spoken in different languages and local dialects to help encourage vaccine participation.

Local stations' broadcast infrastructure not only provides the educational and informational content Americans expect from public media, but it also provides emergency alerting and communications services at the national, state, and local levels. Often unnoticed until times of emergency, these services direct people to safety and transport messages from federal, state, and local emergency management and public safety officials. Further, national public media organizations and local stations have resilience requirements comparable to those of our nation's public safety systems.

Nationally, the public television interconnection system serves as a distribution point for PBS WARN, an essential part of FEMA's nationwide Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system. The WEA system relies upon public broadcasters to ensure the delivery of messages that include imminent threats to life and safety, AMBER alerts, and Presidential alerts during a national emergency. Between March 12, 2020, and January 25, 2021, more than 6,470 WEAs were issued by state and local authorities and transmitted over the PBS WARN system in different parts of the country. Approximately 525 of those alerts were for COVID-19, harnessing the reach and ubiquity of mobile device communications to address a pandemic for the first time.

The public radio interconnection system, Public Radio Satellite System® (PRSS), managed by NPR, 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. PRSS is also named as a resource in at least 20 states' emergency plans and many of the public radio stations in these twenty states serve as Primary Entry Point (PEP)

stations. The PRSS national network of nearly 400 interconnected public radio stations supports secure, reliable communications during emergencies without relying on the Internet, which may be off-line during emergencies.

Stations' infrastructure also provides for public safety and communications services tailored to the needs of their communities. In times of emergency and disaster, enabled public radio stations use MetaPub technology to deliver graphic alerts and messages such as weather forecasts and shelter information. For example, California stations successfully tested the use of MetaPub alerting during the Great California Shakeout earthquake drill in 2016 and demonstrated how stations can bring emergency communications to affected audiences. During any evacuation in Mississippi, the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency works with Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB) to broadcast evacuation and traffic information on all MPB radio stations. MetaPub was also used during the pandemic to direct viewers and listeners to local resources and the latest public health guidelines.

Public media's public safety capabilities are valued and utilized by local, state, and federal public safety officials. In 2020, California's public media stations partnered with Listos California and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services on a statewide media campaign called "Building Resiliency with Emergency Preparedness." The cultural and linguistic appropriate campaign is designed to reach diverse and underserved populations and encourage them to plan for wildfires and other natural disasters. Also in 2020, the Florida Public Radio Emergency Network (FPREN) partnered with the Florida Division of Emergency Management to launch a statewide communications initiative, "Know Your Zone, Know Your Home." The PSA campaign emphasized the importance of knowing where you live and how that impacts your hurricane evacuation plans. With a mission to serve the community combined with trusted partnerships with public safety officials, public media stations help keep Americans prepared and safe.

Public media's capabilities and involvement in public safety are evolving with the modern needs of local first responders and the communities they serve. Increasingly, stations are partnering with local first responders and emergency management officials to offer datacasting technology. Through datacasting, the television broadcast spectrum is used to securely transmit essential encrypted information to first responders in the field in real-time and without the capacity constraints of traditional mobile or broadband delivery. Datacasting applications can include equipping police cars with the ability to receive school blueprints when a crisis arises; providing access to 24/7 camera feeds for public safety challenges; and connecting public safety agencies in real-time.

Initially tested in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, datacasting technology has been utilized during numerous events in the last several years, including the NCAA Final Four, the Super Bowl, and Hurricane Harvey and the flooding of 2016. In 2018, KVIE public television in Sacramento, CA, worked with the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to test public television's datacasting capability to more rapidly deliver early earthquake warnings. The station's datacasting delivered an early earthquake warning in under three seconds. The previous warning standard was 30 seconds. Recently, in Tennessee, public television stations (WKNO, Memphis; WLJT, Lexington; WNPT, Nashville;

WCTE, Cookeville; East Tennessee PBS, Knoxville; and WTCI, Chattanooga) partner with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security to form the first statewide datacasting network.

In June 2018, the FCC's CSRIC Working Group 2 issued a final report on "Comprehensive Re-imaging of Emergency Alerting," which recognizes public television's important service in our nation's public safety system. Section 6.4 states, "PBS and local public television stations play a crucial role in protecting communities by using datacasting to deliver essential information to individuals and first responders. These benefits are all made possible by public broadcasting stations' unique reach, reliability, and role across America, and are especially vital in rural and underserved areas."

While public media stations are dedicated to serving the needs of their communities, their ability to provide these life-saving public safety services relies on technical infrastructure that is often aging past its expected end-of-life. In 2017, CPB commissioned a comprehensive System Technology Assessment to understand better public media stations' technology needs. The station response rate was unprecedented (73 percent of radio and 92 percent of television licensees), cataloging more than 60,000 pieces of equipment throughout the system. The Assessment projected that the system's financial capacity to address equipment repair and replacement would see a cumulative shortfall of more than \$300 million by 2020. In early 2021, a CPB survey of only 10 percent of the public media licensees indicated that there is at least \$175 million in equipment needs. Without resources to maintain and replace broadcast transmission infrastructure on schedule, as well as recover from the gap in maintenance during COVID-19, TV and radio licensees of all sizes and types could face operating challenges nationwide, disrupting the essential public safety service these stations provide.

Addressing the growing need for resilient public safety infrastructure, the Next Generation Warning System (NGWS) will enable the expansion and enhance the reliability of the alert, warning and interoperable communications activities that public broadcasting stations are committed to, while providing first responders and public safety officials with new communication resources. NGWS would allow for public broadcasting entities to procure, construct, and improve transmission and other public safety-related equipment and services that secure and strengthen public media's role in helping protect and preserve American communities.

Mr. Chairman 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 this funding request.