

ALASKA PUBLIC MEDIA
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March 17, 2017

Senate Finance Committee
Honorable Senator _____

Dear Senator _____,

First, thank you for your service. The tireless and often thankless work in which you engage on behalf of all Alaskans often goes unrecognized. Especially, during the challenging economic times in which we find ourselves. However, after learning that the Senate Finance Committee you co-chair recommends completely defunding public broadcasting in our state, I am compelled to write and share with you, from my perspective as a professional broadcaster with over ten years of experience, information about a vital service Alaskan's stand to lose if these cuts become law.

Public broadcasting, or what we now call public media, operates on three mission-driven principles: the creation and distribution of instructional, educational and cultural programming; civil dialog, civic information, and community engagement; **and free, reliable, redundant access to potentially lifesaving public safety information and alerts.**

The cuts proposed by your committee put all of these services in jeopardy, especially in rural communities throughout our state. One area of loss, however, gives me the greatest concern. **That is the potentially quick erosion of Alaska's public safety information infrastructure.**

The Alaskan EAS service is governed by a State EAS Plan. This plan designates distribution systems and listening and relaying assignments for stations. Public radio stations represent eleven (11) out of the State's twenty-two (22) "Local Primary Stations", those stations who are the primary source of EAS information in their region. All eleven (11) are rural stations. ARCS provides a "State Relay Network", a source that sixteen (16) of the primary stations use, as do many other "downstream" stations in both urban and rural markets. You can see that the system is integrated and interdependent.

EAS and PBS-AWARN, vital public safety information services of which Alaska Public Media is a primary provider, **will be lost in sole service rural communities throughout the state.**

The ARCS television distribution system, for which there is no market driven substitute, passes on EAS and PBS-AWARN alerts to broadcasters in rural and urban communities via satellite. EAS and PBS-AWARN will be eliminated should the funding cuts proposed by the Senate Finance Committee be adopted. This means, television viewers in the villages will not see or hear EAS or PBS-AWARN alerts at home on their over-the-air TV sets. Bush radio listeners in communities served by translators fed by the satellite system will lose that distribution channel. Radio listeners with only one station would lose local and regional EAS access. Television stations in Anchorage, Mat Su, Kenia, Juneau, Fairbanks, and Bethel will lose access to ARCS as a listening assignment, weakening EAS and PBS-AWARN capabilities.

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Eventually, state funding cuts will lead to the erosion of these same public safety and infrastructure resources in urban centers that rely on state funding to offset operating expenses that currently fund capital expenditures in support of a collaborative, interdependent statewide public broadcasting system.

Here is an example: ***Later this month the system will conduct its annual "Live Code" Tsunami Test.*** It is a unique use of the EAS system to see how effective a real tsunami alert would be should such an event occur. Stations in Anchorage will not broadcast the alert because Anchorage is not in the tsunami zone. However, Anchorage television stations operate translators down the Kenai Peninsula. ***Alaska Public Media depends on the signal over the ARCS satellite to capture the alert and relay it to translators down the line. These cuts threaten that capability and could one day endanger and potentially lead to greater loss of life if these potentially lifesaving services should cease to exist.***

In addition, due in large part to these potential cuts, Alaska will fall behind the Lower 48 when the FCC approves a new digital broadcast transmission standard ATSC 3.0. Public broadcasting in Alaska will be unable to secure the financial resources to leverage new technologies that allow transmission of lifesaving digital information to police, fire, and first responder vehicles. Las Vegas, Houston, Boston, and many other public media institutions have used state investment to build new and innovative lifesaving public safety communications infrastructures.

It should be recognized, that the state investment in Alaska Public Media represents 7% of AKPM's annual budget and costs the state about .54 cents per each Alaskan we serve. With that investment, each year AKPM leverages the state investment and raises an additional \$4.2 Million from individual donors, corporate partners, foundations, and other community partnerships. And AKPM reinvests these community funds to provide state-wide television in partnership with Juneau, Bethel, and APBI-ARCS, statewide radio infrastructure investment (currently the Murdock Foundation and AKPM have funded a receiver upgrade project for twenty-four (24) APRN member stations), and a statewide news and information service (with forty (40) journalism professionals employed in the far corners of our state).

It is my hope that this new information will encourage you to reconsider the Senate Finance Committee's recommendation to defund public broadcasting. Should you require additional information or have questions of me, please do not hesitate -- email, write, or call.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward J. Ulman
CEO & General Manager
Alaska Public Media