

Maine Public Testimony to  
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

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Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and the Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to briefly share Maine Public's request for support from the Legislature for our ongoing broadcast infrastructure of public television and radio.

Today we will present our biennial budget request that reflects public broadcasting's critical role in the Emergency Alert System – the EAS – in partnership with Maine Emergency Management Agency, Maine Association of Broadcasters, and the hundreds of thousands of citizens and households in Maine who watch and listen each week and depend on the 24/7 service of Maine Public.

Maine Public is an independent non-profit public broadcaster that was formed in 1992 through the merger of the University of Maine's Public TV and Radio network, and the Colby, Bates and Bowdoin College's Public TV Channel 10 television station. At the time of the merger of the two institutions, and the network became independent entity, the State of Maine took on the responsibility through State Statute of providing the ongoing financial support to pay for the infrastructure costs of operating the 5 television stations and the 7 FM radio stations.

Those ongoing yearly operating costs total over \$3.2 million in power, transmission and maintenance for the 24/7 signals at the over 30 tower sites across Maine. The actual costs far exceed the direct support provided by the Legislature – this year, the proposed amount is for \$1.65 million – and that is a helpful increase after 10 years of declining funding. We're very grateful for that in a challenging funding year for the State. However, it is still approximately half of the necessary funds to operate this statewide network.

The remaining costs for transmission are paid for from the programming and operations budget of Maine Public, provided by the community in the form of donors, underwriters. We would respectfully request that the Legislature and this committee continue to work towards providing the full funding by statute in this Biennial budget for Maine Public of \$3.2 million dollars.

We'd like to share for a moment the work that Maine Public has done over the past year during this pandemic. And it's a simple message: Maine Public has been incredibly appreciated during

Covid-19 by the people of Maine – for the exceptional programming on radio and television and digital when all of us have been homebound, and our lives disrupted. During this time, Maine Public has STEPPED UP and delivered more content than ever before, and reached more Mainers than ever before in our history over the past year. Over 400,000 households on television tune in each week, and nearly 250,000 individuals listen to the stations of Maine Public Radio each week.

In spite of the lockdowns and quarantines, Maine Public has been and continues to be a **connection point for News** like the regular broadcasts of the CDC briefings, the reporting on Covid-19, both nationally and regionally. From the PBS NewsHour to NPR News and Morning Edition on radio, the news in an unprecedented election year has been a TRUSTED source of independent journalism for all of us. And as listeners and viewers shared with us, public broadcasting is where Mainers can turn to for in-depth reporting locally, nationally and internationally, as a place for reliable information and trusted independent news where the facts matter.

Maine Public has been a **connection point for information** when we've all been hungry for discussions about what's actually happening in the state – and Maine Calling every weekday morning at 11 is a place on the radio where thousands of Mainers are tuning in to gain a deeper understanding of everything from the elections, to the best books to read, or directly talking with our governor or elected officials and asking them questions.

Maine Public has been a **connection point for music** - with 24 hours of classical music on the radio for home bound folks, the music provides beauty, companionship and solace on our new network of Maine Public Classical. And interestingly, reaching over 50,000 people tuning in each week.

Maine Public has been a **connection point for education** – our teams launched service last spring on television called The Learning Space for grade school kids at home, grades 3-5. In partnership with the Dept. of Education leadership, and Educate Maine, we had Maine Teachers of the Year who created their own videos and we broadcast them on statewide television into homes where there was limited internet access. The amazing thing is that each episode reached, on average, 1,800 kids who tuned in – the equivalent of 90 Maine Classrooms each day on television. <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/welcome-learning-space>

On the financial side, we were fortunate to receive PPP monies that helped us keep our staff and organization working with no furloughs or layoffs, even as there was tremendous uncertainty over our funding. That sense of stability was helped through additional Federal support through the CARES act, where the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was able to provide financial support of \$447,000 in our last fiscal year to our statewide radio and television network. Again, an important safety net during the uncertain time of Covid-19, even as our

staff of nearly 100 professionals were dispersed and working from home, in adverse conditions in the field, and figuring out how to do remote broadcasting for our programs and hosts so listeners and viewers continued to have uninterrupted service.

Maine Public is a key partner with MEMA as the **primary broadcast network in the Emergency Alert System** – the EAS – whose distinctive tones are essential in the case of public safety, adverse weather, or national emergencies from the President. That EAS infrastructure is built into our broadcast network, and we monitor and test it 24/7 as required by law from our multiple network locations. We serve these rural and urban communities as a partner like we always have- but it remains both expensive, and technically challenging to keep these 5 television stations and 14 FM radio broadcast transmitters operational. When we include the transmission links- that's nearly 30 sites that we operate far away from the general public, but they have to be "on the air" every day.

The dollars that come from the state are used for these purposes: electricity, fuel, maintenance, and more to keep these signals available to every Mainer. The programming costs for TV and Radio are exclusive of State monies, and supported from the listeners and viewers and underwriters, and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Thank you for your time today, and we'd be happy to answer any questions you may have for us about Maine Public, and our state-wide radio and television service to the people of Maine.



