

FROM: Christopher Wiersema

ORCA Media (Onion River Community Access Media)

RE: FY2024 Budget

My name is Christopher Wiersema. I am a Co-Director at ORCA Media, which is the community media center in Montpelier. I'm also a current board member of the Vermont Access Network (VAN) - the organization that represents the 24 community media centers and PEG-TV organizations throughout Vermont.

I am here to ask that you please support the Vermont Access Network and our state's 24 Community Media Centers - with a one-time appropriation of \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2024. This will be a third-year of bridge funding to help replace declining cable revenues.

Community Media Centers are important because they provide free video production resources, they educate community members in modern media skills, and consistently cover local government and public meetings.

I've personally witnessed the enthusiasm and creativity among youth participating in our summer education programs, such as the Vermont Youth Documentary Lab at ORCA Media, and our year-round support of media education at local schools. These opportunities are only possible because of the community space, resources, and skilled staff at ORCA Media.

In Montpelier, ORCA Media fills a need by providing access to local government for community members who can't attend meetings at specific times. We make these meetings available online and on local television so people can follow issues they care about on their own time.

The Vermont Access Network helps Vermonters tell stories, urge action, and connect with their community. With this bridge funding, we can maintain our contribution to civic and community engagement throughout Vermont.

Thank you for your support.