



January 26, 2016

The Honorable Mitzi Johnson, Chair
House Commerce Committee
State House, 115 State Street
Montpelier VT 05663
Re: Support for Vermont PBS

Dear Representative Johnson and Committee:

Question: What is the agency in Vermont serving thousands --both children and families in poverty and housebound seniors – now for just \$271,000 per year? The answer is Vermont PBS.

A large percentage of our viewers fall into three categories: rural residents with limited (geographic and financial) access to media; retirees on fixed incomes; and preschool children. Tens of thousands of Vermonters who are unable to contribute a dime to Vermont PBS are dependent on the quality educational programs we provide. We are not radio, and these are not news programs for commuters. Our costs of programming are higher and our audiences don't attract advertising dollars the way commuters do. Yet Vermont PBS consistently returns Vermont's investment through childhood and adult education, civic engagement and access to non-commercial programming. These efforts are at the heart of educational television.

Education and Outreach for Impoverished Families:

- **Outreach to Families:** PBS stations reach more children from ages 2-5, more mothers with young children, and more children from low-income families than any other 'kids TV' network. This year Vermont PBS is combining in-person and televised training to bolster positive parenting skills in a partnership with [Champlain Valley Headstart](#), and [Greater Burlington YMCA](#), working directly with their respective clientele in a highly replicable and cost-effective model.
- **Equalizing Pre-school Preparation:** Ten thousand Vermont preschool children are better prepared for preschool **by 30%** in reading comprehension and math readiness skills because they utilize PBS educational television. Public television programming is available to preschool children for free – anywhere, any time - over the air and online – (no cable access, transportation, or teachers required). Research nationally tells us that for families below the poverty line, 25% are dependent on free, “over the air” access to television.
- **Positive Influence for Toddlers:** For toddlers at home in challenging family or care environments, Vermont PBS is a cost-effective outreach tool to provide up to six hours daily of consistent, caring, educational television. Many PBS programs work not only on school readiness, but also on social skills and demonstrate diverse and inclusive family settings.



VERMONT PBS

- **Positive Family Engagement:** Whether it's the "Pre-School Film Festival" at Catamount Arts, the family-friendly Halloween studio "party" for over 500 children, or the multiple events organized for free or nearly free, thousands of young families across the state utilize opportunities offered by Vermont PBS. These events are structured to encourage creativity among children and affordable, positive experiences for participating families.

Curricula for Budget-Challenged Schools:

- **History, Science and Civics.** Vermont PBS participates in classroom science – showcasing innovative educational programs that engage Vermont teachers and children in learning from the natural environment. It provides educational programming in history, civics, and science accessible in classrooms at no additional expense. Thousands of classrooms engage Vermont PBS content as an integral part of the school curriculum.
- **Support for Teachers.** Vermont teachers and homeschoolers have free access to more than 100,000 curriculum-aligned digital resources through PBS Learning Media. Thousands of individual teachers and homeschooling parents have signed up through Vermont PBS to receive lesson plans and homework guides that unlock the information-rich programming available to students --entirely for free to these educators and students through the States most cost effective delivery system.
- **Using the Public Platform to Encourage Scholastic Participation.** More than any other media outlet, and specifically because it is non-commercial and community based, Vermont PBS opens its airwaves to young people to encourage their development. Whether it's showcasing elementary school children in the "Young Writers Contest" or high school children in broadcast of "Poetry Out Loud," Vermont PBS incentivizes participation with on-screen visibility. This year, for the second year in a row, Vermont PBS will collaborate with the "Freedom & Unity Film Festival" to screen the production skills of student and young adults – elevating the visibility of this creative outlet funded by the Vermont Community Foundation.
- **Teaching Civil Engagement in Schools.** Teachers in public high schools all over the state, and in the state college system, have utilized Vermont PBS to provide current, relevant and unbiased discussion in difficult social topics. Whether discrimination, veterans' issues, autism, addiction, or poverty, we give hope to marginalized populations and foster civil engagement on topics that may otherwise be left in the shadows. Vermont PBS not only engages difficult issues on air and online, it promotes discussion in-person through seminars and classroom-based settings. This last year alone we have partnered with 17 groups and agencies to deliver discussions on special needs learners, autism, trans-gender issues, opiate addiction, domestic violence, and veterans' issues **to over 2600 participants in 12 counties.**



Hope and Participation for Those Who Can't Otherwise Attend:

- **Taking the Arts to Them; They are Taxpayers Too:** We expand the benefit of the Legislature's expenditures on the arts to the homebound and the poor, by serving thousands of Vermonters who cannot reach a theater, a gallery, or a reading, and by broadcasting projects by the Vermont Arts Council, the Flynn Performing Arts Center, the Vermont Humanities Council, and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, sending a selection of their high-quality programs to homes statewide. No other media outlet provides this service.
- **Participating in the World – For Free and From Home:** Where health or mobility is a barrier, Vermont PBS programming helps provide the basis for a civil society: non-commercial, non-political, and quality programming. Our programs provide Vermonters with direct access to legislators and decision makers, and support the values inherent in a civil, informed electorate. Other PBS programming provides intellectual stimulation. Either way, we hear from viewers daily who say “what would I do without... Vermont PBS?”

A Platform for State Government

- **Amplifying the Message and Showcasing the Work of the State:** We provide a platform for the work of State agencies, promoting the interests of Vermont beyond its boundaries through programming such as **Outdoor Journal**, a series that promotes family outdoor recreation, conservation, and Vermont's parks and waterways, and **InnoVaTe**, a new series that puts a spotlight on Vermont's creative business community. As Secretary Moulton has said, “I love it!” And it promotes the potential of the economy of Vermont in an approach that requires no additional “sales pitch” or expenditures.
- **A Communications Backbone for the Visual Experience:** Vermont PBS is a communications delivery system that reaches virtually everyone in the state – anywhere, any time – and can be used as a limitless resource for sharing that which is important to Vermont. We use this network to provide Vermonters with direct access to newsmakers, legislators and decision makers, supporting the values inherent in a civil, informed electorate. It can be used to reach Vermonters in so many ways, in a medium that is uniquely effective because it is visual. But only if we can continue to maintain and operate it.

Basically there are two ways to operate Vermont's statewide public television service:

- Option 1: ‘Hook up the fiber’ to the PBS national program stream, fire most of the staff, and operate as a ‘pass-through’ service.



- Option 2: Serve Vermont with educational programming targeted to our community, bring civil discussion to sensitive issues, and operate a high-tech public platform that is in service to all Vermonters. This is today's model. And because we have this model we are able to deliver.

Vermont PBS is at a crossroads.

We at Vermont PBS have begun the work of growing an economically sustainable platform. The work to become self-sustaining comes in an uncertain economic market, and the Legislature demands that it be implemented at break-neck speed. At the same time, we consider ourselves a partner with the State in delivering services, available to all Vermonters - regardless of their ability to support it. But we can't do it alone and not in 18 months' time.

This week its board of civic leaders* has voted that the PBS mission deserves the support of the State. Other states understand the service mission of public television and provide an *average* appropriation of \$1,000,000 per year for the nation's 30 stations of comparable size. We respectfully request that the Legislature accept some level of participation in this endeavor. Today, three percent of Vermonters contribute 75% of the funding that keeps the station on the air. We ask that the Legislature provide a small but critical 4% of the Vermont PBS budget (\$271,000) – in recognition of the thousands of Vermonters who depend on this service but are not able to contribute.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Holly Groschner
President

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