

Testimony from Scott Finn, President and CEO

RE: Coronavirus Relief Fund

June 4, 2020

Chair Briglin, Vice Chair Sibilila and members of the House Energy and Technology Committee,

Thank you for giving VPR the opportunity to request reimbursement for the costs incurred and expected during the Coronavirus crisis.

Since March, Vermont Public Radio has devoted its statewide radio broadcast network and online resources to provide free educational services and access to crucial health and safety information. We have done so at a great additional cost, even as our members and underwriters face severe challenges, threatening our main sources of revenue.

We've done this because too many of Vermont's schoolchildren do not have access to a reliable internet connection, putting them at a major disadvantage with their peers. VPR's broadcasts are freely accessible to most Vermonters through a radio in their car or home. Our programming also can be accessed through smartphones and home computers, both streaming and on-demand as a podcast.

At the request of the Agency of Education, VPR joined Vermont PBS in providing educational programming via broadcast, and it is our intention to continue to do so at least through this calendar year. In fact, we have plans to provide even more educational programming in the fall, and to enrich it with curricula that are aligned with the standards Vermont teachers and students strive to meet.

The centerpiece of our educational programs is "But Why?" our program and podcast for curious kids. But Why has increased its digital and broadcast impact. Digitally, between March 1 and May 31, But Why had 1,836,700 downloads from 629,000 people. They were in 202 countries around the world. Here in Vermont, 7,343 people downloaded 22,122 episodes of But Why!

But Why also expanded its programming to produce new hour-long educational broadcasts in cooperation with the Vermont Agency of Education, aired every Friday at 1 p.m. - including Jim Green, [NASA's](#) Chief Scientist, and a kids' press conference with Governor Scott. VPR has also partnered with the Agency of Education on a virtual prom, and is planning a virtual statewide graduation.

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We are also planning additional educational programming and matching curricula, including:

- Ongoing programming exploring our universe in cooperation with the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium
- A doubling of the episodes of "Outdoor Radio," the exploration of Vermont's natural world, with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies
- New episodes of Brave Little State that engage with Vermont students to answer their questions about our state

In addition to our educational programming, VPR will continue to provide critical direct access to public information, such as the state's coronavirus press conferences, through both our online and broadcast networks.

All of this service depends on maintaining VPR's statewide broadcast reliability, as well as its free digital access. To meet the growing demand for our services and ensure universal access, VPR is having to immediately make needed replacements and repairs to key equipment, especially our largest transmitter sites, 107.9 FM on Mount Mansfield. Our Bennington transmitter requires an HVAC replacement to prevent overheating, and our Montpelier transmitter faces a deadline to move to another location.

Finally, VPR has been required to invest in new equipment to allow employees to work and broadcast from home. And now, we are needing to create more studio space so hosts and producers can safely do their jobs.

Attached is a budget outlining our request in more detail. I welcome your questions, and thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Scott Finn

President and CEO, Vermont Public Radio

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Mount Mansfield transmitter replacement	\$222,000	Failing transmitter must be replaced immediately to ensure ability to cover our largest service area
Bennington transmitter site HVAC	\$16,000	To address heat-related failures in equipment and outages
Montpelier translators relocation	\$54,000	To meet deadline to move Montpelier translators to new location to maintain reliable coverage
Increased streaming capacity	\$8,000	Adds ability to handle surge in online listeners due to coronavirus
Remote computer and recording equipment	\$12,000	Laptops to enable reporters, hosts, and support personnel to remotely broadcast and work on key programs
Add Live control room capacity to studio	\$30,000	Adds ability to have programs hosted in a safely distanced environment
Remote studios/broadcasting personnel support	\$157,000	For increased workloads and hours of key personnel supporting new VPR workflows, such as support for Covid-19 programming remote production
Curriculum specialist (contract)	\$100,000	To create curriculum for broadcast and on-demand programming across several shows
But Why Executive Producer, Senior Producer, Assistant	\$175,000	Increased costs to cover broadcasting episodes, repurposing existing episodes and other educational outreach
Brave Little State programs/curriculum	\$50,000	Increased costs to cover new episodes, repurposing existing episodes and other educational outreach
Fairbanks Museum astronomy module	\$50,000	Increased costs to cover new episodes, repurposing existing episodes and other educational outreach
VPR Total	\$874,000	