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February 19, 2024

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Public Hearing

Lisa Byer, Executive Director
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My name is Lisa Byer, I am the Executive Director of Catamount Access Television (CAT-TV) in Bennington, VT. CAT-TV is Bennington's local community media center dedicated to amplifying local voices and celebrating community spirit. We serve as the Public, Educational, Governmental (PEG) Access Center for Bennington, and its neighboring towns - North Bennington, Woodford, Pownal and Shaftsbury. As members of the Vermont Access Network (VAN), we stand united alongside 24 other PEG Access Centers in our state.

As the local media center, we promote access to multimedia services that foster free speech and public dialogue. We provide coverage of hyper-local content that encourages citizens to engage in local government, education, arts, and other areas of interest. We also offer equipment and training to citizens to enable them to tell their own stories.

The purpose of my testimony is asking for support of the Vermont Access Network with \$1 million in one-time funding, while a permanent funding source is discussed in the legislature.

I can personally say that CAT-TV has experienced a significant drop in cable funding with a drop of \$34,000 from last year. The likely cause of this rapid decline is the introduction of Fidium Fiber as a new internet service provider in our area. While we support the expansion of options for internet access and streaming platforms, we cannot ignore the collateral damage to our funding base. In the absence of a long-term legislative solution, this bridge funding is critical to our operations and ability to provide the essential services that our community relies on.

Please support the Vermont Access Network with a one-time appropriation of \$1 million for fiscal year 2025.

Sincerely,

Lisa Byer
Executive Director

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