



24 January 2025

TESTIMONY: VERMONT ACCESS NETWORK (VAN) FY26 Budget Request

SUBMITTED: Lauren-Glenn Davitian, Public Policy Director for CCTV Center for Media & Democracy on behalf of VAN, davitian@cctv.org

Chair Birong and Members of the House Government Operations Committee:

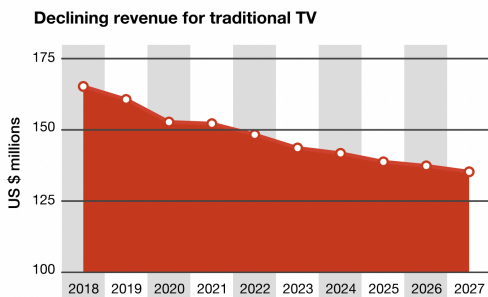
Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House Government Operations Committee. Vermont Access Network (VAN) is seeking \$1.35 million in base funding as part of the Secretary of State's FY26 Budget, and we are here to ask for your support of our request in your Budget Memo to the House Appropriations Committee.

Vermont Access Network (VAN) is a nonprofit membership organization established to promote the effective operation and advancement of Public, Educational and Government (PEG) Access TV, also known as community media.

Vermont's 24 community media centers deliver essential media services to communities within and outside of cable TV service territories in Vermont. These include coverage of public meetings and community events, local news and information programs, media education for all ages, preservation of local history through extensive archival work and on-the-spot delivery of emergency information.

VAN connects, supports and advocates for 24 community media centers which employ 150 Vermonters, producing more than 18,000 hours of programming each year—surpassing any other media outlet in Vermont.

These programs air on more than 80 local cable channels and dozens of internet “channels” reaching viewers and community members across the state. The reach of Vermont’s community media centers extend to internet viewers as well. In 2024, Vermont’s AMOs report widespread engagement on various internet platforms, including 1,342,433 YouTube views and 283,000+ website visits.



Source: Global Entertainment, Media & Telecommunications Outlook 2023-2027

As cable subscriptions decline in favor of internet based options, funding for community media is declining even as demand for local news, information and entertainment is increasing.

Vermont’s community media centers generate more than \$10 million in revenue, from cable franchise revenue (\$7.8M) and other sources (\$2.3M) including fees for service, memberships, underwriting, municipal support and state and federal grants. Cable revenue accounts, on average, for 75% of funding for Vermont’s community media operations. (Range: 65% - 95%).

In recognition of VAN’s vital service to civic education and engagement, and in light of its funding challenges, the Vermont Legislature voted in FY25 to include Vermont Access Network in the Secretary of State’s base budget at \$1 million. The legislature included language in the Budget Bill that directed the Secretary of State and VAN to work together to determine the amount needed in future years.

Looking ahead at cable revenue funding trends, and increasing demand for community media services (which fill a widening gap in the local news landscape), VAN has worked closely with the Vermont Secretary of State to develop a three-year funding plan.

We very much appreciate the Secretary of State's willingness to review our funding and expense projections, and to partner with us in developing this plan. The funding plan we have agreed to is based on projections of revenue and expenses over the next three years:

- FY26 - \$1.35M
- FY27 - \$1.8M
- FY28 - \$2M.

In FY25, VAN's members will see a minimum 7-10% decrease in cable revenue (\$600K) and anticipate a 7-10% (\$660K) increase in expenses (primarily labor, healthcare, and capital investments; and, increased demand on our services necessary to operate media operations).

Thank you for your consideration of our FY2026 budget request, and for your past support of the Vermont Access Network and Vermont's Community Media Centers. We hope you will support our request for \$1.35m in FY2026 in your Budget Memo this year. We are happy to provide any additional information you might need.

A quick recap of VAN services:

Government Transparency and Public Access



- Election and Candidate Forums
- Municipal + School Board Meetings
- Various Local Boards + Community Meetings
- Statehouse Coverage - Statewide

Increased technical abilities and offers modern state of the art service subsidized.

Education + Media Literacy



- School Sports + Music Programs, supplementing public school budgets
- Youth Vacation Media Camps
- Media Education Workshops, Apprenticeships + Job Training for All ages

Community Connection + Local Identity



- Media Services for Nonprofit Organizations at Low/ No Cost
- Open Platform for Arts, Culture, Faith and Activist Communities
- Local News + Emergency Information