

June 12, 2020

Chairwoman Nita Lowey
Committee on Appropriations
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Richard Shelby
Committee on Appropriations
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Kay Granger
Committee on Appropriations
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy
Committee on Appropriations
437 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman and Chairman Lowy and Shelby and Ranking Members Granger and Leahy,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing rural and agricultural interests across America, we write to express our support of our local media stations. Our communities rely on the vital information they provide on a daily basis, and their continued operation is vital as navigate these extraordinary times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected local communities across our nation in unprecedented ways. Radio and television broadcasters and rural newspapers provide local news, emergency alerts, educational programming and, for less populated rural communities, turning to local media has become an even more important way to stay connected. In many rural areas, broadcast stations are the predominant or only form of local information. This fact is only increased by the lack of adequate rural broadband, making it even more important that local media can continue to provide their services during the COVID-19 pandemic so that all Americans are able to stay up to date with the latest news and information in their communities.

Local media outlets are devoting around-the-clock time and resources to reporting and informing communities on every aspect of COVID-19, even as they themselves are suffering significant losses due to the loss in revenue once provided by their main street advertising partners. Local media has always relied on advertising as its primary source of revenue, which is then reinvested back into local news and journalism. Without advertisements from the local auto dealer, corner restaurant or feed store, these trusted local media outlets will not survive.

When the first shelter-in-place orders were enacted, local media outlets, large and small, saw an immediate cancellation and downturn in advertising revenue, which has continued at a rapid decline during the last two months. Specifically, most local broadcasters have seen advertising decline more than 50 percent compared to this time last year and some are seeing cancellations approaching 90 percent compared to the year before. Industry experts expect that the full impact of revenue losses will be between \$5 and \$10 billion as businesses remain closed. Losses like these threaten our local broadcasters and media and the information they provide. As we have seen in other sectors, such as agriculture, help from the federal government has been needed in order to sustain operations.

Just as local media can help restart main street businesses and the economy, advertising on these mediums can help disperse critical government messages during this crisis and recovery to rural America. We urge you to prioritize existing federal agency advertising funds to be spent with local broadcasters and news publishers, and appropriate additional federal advertising funding in future stimulus or appropriations bills that are distributed across local media sectors and equitably allocated across large, medium and small

communities. Our local broadcasters are a critical component of our communities and the services they provide cannot be lost.

Sincerely,



American Agri-Women



American Dairy Coalition



National Association of Wheat Growers



Rocky Mountain Farmers Union



South Dakota Farmers Union



United States Cattlemen's Association



Rural & Agriculture Council of America