



March 24, 2025

The Honorable Marjorie Taylor Greene
Chairwoman, House Subcommittee on Delivering On Government Efficiency
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Melanie Stansbury
Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Delivering On Government Efficiency
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairwoman Greene, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share what public media means to rural Americans today. I hope you will consider this letter in your hearing.

I grew up in Fulton County, Kentucky. People were farmers, teachers, on the factory line, working on the river 28 days on/28 days off. The median household income is still \$36,000 a year. It is rural America, and we were one of the least populous or prosperous counties in the state. But we were a community.

I am now the station manager at WKMS - Murray State's NPR station. And that - if nothing else - is what I hope to convey in this letter. NPR is - at its core - a network. Hundreds of stations in small (and large) places run by people like me who grew up in farming communities, inner cities, Alaskan fishing villages... A collection of Americans from all backgrounds who want to see their communities grow and thrive.

So, what is WKMS? A place where local people can learn about far off places like Somalia or Sudan or Ukraine. Where they can catch up on local politics and hear about the issues on their ballots. Where they can learn about non-profits and arts events in Murray or Paducah or Cadiz or Hopkinsville. Where they can hear local bands for the first time or finally understand complex economic and infrastructure issues. Where they can learn and benefit from university professors who are experts at what they do. It is where people learned how to get water and hot food during the ice storm in 2009. It is where people got updates on power outages and shelters the day after the tornados of December 10, 2021, while the internet was still down.

Essentially, we are a space on the radio where community is built.

How do you put a price on education and information that is free for everyone? On cultural experiences like the Metropolitan Opera being available over the air in counties where an opera has never been staged? On programs for lifelong learning like *Science Friday* that have literally inspired listeners to go back to school?

More importantly, on local voices and issues being elevated. Last year we produced a series on *Voices of Service* - where we shared the stories of veterans across branches in our region. The year before we highlighted rural women's healthcare and hospice nurses. One of our student reporters won a National Edward R. Murrow award last year for a story on young farmers. We have done hour-long documentaries on coal and waterways and steel. We air area poets each April, stories, songs that focus on local mental health each May, over 1700 hours of locally or volunteer-produced music programming each year and over 3,500 local or statewide newscasts. Our region's stories deserve to be told. And deserve to be shared on a larger stage too - not just in times of tragedy, but in times of triumph.

Of course, perhaps the most critical role of public media is its ability to be there in times of crisis. Through the interconnection system, 99% of Americans are served by emergency alerts. This nationwide infrastructure, with three direct connections to FEMA, provides the backbone for America's emergency alert system. On a local level, WKMS is the EAS primary for much of Kentucky's Areas 1 & 2 for Emergency Management (Congressman Comer's district). The NGWS grant we were approved for last year would have given us the ability to put a generator at our WKMT transmitter site in Water Valley - which serves some of the most rural counties in Kentucky. So they would still be able to get those emergency alerts if the power to the transmitter went out. As you may know, FEMA has since paused that program for review. This could undermine the safety of the emergency network - which is often reliant on radio. Yes, digital is everywhere now. You can get the weather on YouTube. But when the power goes out and Wi-Fi is down, it's that weather radio or car radio that becomes essential.

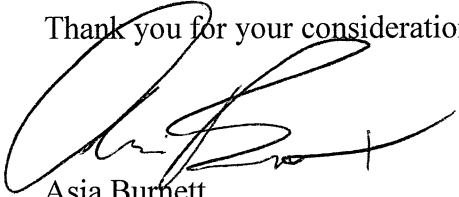
Being part of a university, I would be remiss to end without mentioning one of our most important functions as a station and in terms of our legacy: Training student journalists. Over the past 55 years, WKMS has been a training ground for hundreds of reporters who have gone on to stations all over the country. Teaching fact-checking, ethical guidelines, and seeking solutions about stories that impact people's lives - this is the cornerstone of what we do. This semester alone there are six paid student journalists in our newsroom learning the craft, and seventeen students overall learning radio production, soft skills, public speaking and more through our Radio 101 program or other internships. In a time of news deserts, and more and more local newsrooms dying away, training these rural reporters is one of our proudest accomplishments.

I could go on for pages with quotes from listeners whose lives have been impacted: older folks who find companionship, people who've just moved to the region who feel at home, people who learned about ballot measures or found health and safety information when they needed it for

their families. I could also share quotes from those students I mentioned, who have gone on to be reporters, judges, doctors, community leaders, and more. But I know your time is valuable and this is one of many letters you will no doubt read today.

Please just know that your investment in this service, public media, is not an investment in just radio or television - but in the public. In the culture, safety, transparency and stability of rural communities. In stations like WKMS that are in your districts and that serve your constituents with valuable, freely accessible information when they need it most.

Thank you for your consideration and for all you do for our nation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asia Burnett', with a large, stylized initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Asia Burnett
Station Manager
WKMS-FM