



**Hearing on
“Listen Here: Why Americans Value AM Radio”**

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce**

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

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**Statement of Jerry “J” Chapman
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National Association of Broadcasters

I. Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Matsui, and members of the subcommittee. My name is J Chapman, and I am the president and owner of Woof Boom Radio, which operates broadcast radio stations serving listeners in Indiana and Ohio. I am also the past president of the Indiana Broadcasters Association, and since 2013 have served on its board of directors.

Woof Boom Radio serves Central Indiana and West Central Ohio with twelve radio stations, three of which are AM radio stations: WCIT (940AM, Lima, Ohio); WHBU (1240AM, Anderson, Ind.); and WMUN (1340AM Muncie, Ind.). Each AM station also has an FM translator to expand its reach in our communities, but not necessarily replicate the signal coverage area of AM. As the only locally owned and operated media group in our area, we proudly serve our listeners by using our voice to build our community. This is our vision, which guides us every day.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Association of Broadcasters and its more than 6,400 local television and radio station members that provide a free and valuable service to all our hometowns.

For more than 100 years, broadcast radio has impacted the lives of Americans in significant ways. Local radio stations inform, educate and alert our listeners to important events, local and national issues and emergencies. We are local, involved in our communities and proud to serve the public.

With 82 million monthly listeners nationwide,¹ AM radio is an extremely popular way for Americans to stay connected to news, sports and entertainment. AM radio also

¹ Nielsen.

serves a vital role in our nation's emergency infrastructure as the backbone of the Emergency Alert System. What many do not realize is that more than 60 AM radio stations across the country serve as primary entry points for emergency alerts and deliver them to other AM, FM and local television stations to ensure the public is informed in times of danger. AM radio is one of the most resilient and far-reaching means of communication. When the power goes out and cell networks are down, the car radio is often the only way for people to get information, sometimes for days at a time.

We applaud this subcommittee's attention to the importance of AM radio and its vital role in this country. I look forward to discussing the enduring value of this critical medium and how access to AM radio should be safeguarded to ensure that it remains a critical lifeline to Americans in times of crisis.

II. AM Radio's Focus on Local Communities Is Unique Among Media Options

AM radio plays a crucial role in communities nationwide. After a century of broadcasting, it continues to be popular because our programming, service and cost remain unique among entertainment options. Our locally focused content informs, educates and alerts listeners to important events impacting their communities through our locally based reporting and public service. For Woof Boom Radio, our news coverage is increasingly more important; as a result, we recently added news staff in Indiana and Ohio. This past year, we reprogrammed WMUN to specifically provide local news and information that helps Muncie understand and deal with the community's many complex issues.

Local broadcasters are frequently the last bastion of local and investigative journalism in many communities. We do all of this through a service that is completely

free to listeners, requiring no monthly subscriptions or expensive data charges. For your constituents and many Americans who may be unable to pay for quality, trusted local news, radio broadcasters help ensure they are not left behind. Local radio stations also cover stories that address the cultural and local needs of the audiences we serve, including communities of color and underrepresented groups. There are approximately 4,500 AM radio stations across the U.S.,² of which more than 1,400 are wholly or partially owned by a racial or ethnic minority.³ Today, WMUN is recruiting and developing talk shows hosts from diverse backgrounds to speak about the issues important to many underrepresented groups.

Serving our communities and helping local charities is part of what we do and have done for decades. Broadcasters' dedication to local communities has driven extraordinary levels of public service. I am proud that our AM radio stations exemplify the commitment to public service that is the hallmark of local broadcasting. For example, with many local businesses on the verge of failing in the early days of COVID, WHBU stepped up and began programming a radio-thon called "Buy a Card – Save a Business," where listeners could purchase gift cards to support local businesses. This around-the-clock broadcast infused much-needed cash to many local businesses and was recognized by the Anderson Chamber of Commerce as one of the most important events to help its members that year.

III. AM Radio Reaches Underserved Communities

AM radio stations have a wide reach, covering a much larger geographic area than a cell phone tower, and can be accessed by anyone with a simple radio device.

² <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-23-300A1.pdf>.

³ <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-23-35A1.pdf>.

This ensures that vital information is accessible to everyone, including those in rural or remote areas. Because of AM radio's unique ability to reach a wide geographic area – traveling around and over solid objects such as mountains – it offers many Americans struggling with poor, or non-existent cellular and broadband coverage a chance to stay connected.

AM radio is incredibly important to agricultural communities, providing critical information to farmers and ranchers. Farmers in the field and on rural roadways, not connected to cellular or broadband, can turn to AM radio for the latest weather updates, crop reports and local information.

AM radio serves a number of diverse ethnic audiences, providing a unique and vital service to non-English speakers who may be underserved by general market media. According to BIA, approximately 600 AM stations broadcast all or some content in a language other than English.⁴ Of those, approximately 440 AM stations air Spanish language or Latino/regional formats, and approximately 65 stations deliver programming to Asian audiences.⁵

IV. AM Radio Remains Critical to Public Safety and Other Media Cannot Replicate Its Reliability

Local AM radio stations and their employees report for duty every day, providing the latest local information that keeps communities safe and connected. Radio's enduring commitment to communities provides a critical lifeline service to listeners, sometimes at a moment's notice. For example, last month, two extremely dangerous felons escaped from an Allen County, Ohio prison. Our radio stations, including WCIT-

⁴ BIA Advisory Services.

⁵ BIA Advisory Services.

AM, notified listeners of this news an hour prior to official notifications. Our stations alerting the public gave people the chance to seek safety. It enabled schools, businesses, and other organizations to take the appropriate measures to protect their populations.

Given their signal range and resilient architecture, AM radio stations play a crucial role in the nation's emergency alert system (EAS). The EAS is a national public warning system commonly used by state and local authorities to deliver important emergency information, such as weather and AMBER alerts, to affected communities over television and radio. This system's principal purpose is also to provide the president of the United States with the capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency.

Nearly 80 radio stations serve as Primary Entry Points (PEPs) across the country,⁶ with more than 60 being AM radio stations. These are designated radio stations whose signals cover 90% of the American population and have a direct connection to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Weather Service (NWS). Most PEP stations are AM radio stations because their signals can cover vast areas, some with a 700-mile coverage radius, and travel better through solid objects like mountains. If you think about important information that must be broadcast to as many people at once, like severe weather warnings or government announcements, AM radio achieves that. FEMA has invested millions in these stations, making them in-effect "battle-hardened" to withstand various natural disasters and acts

⁶ <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/broadcasters-wireless>.

of terrorism so they will be able to communicate critical information. In times of crisis, these stations receive emergency information and alerts directly from the federal government, ensuring a reliable and authoritative source of information for the public. These stations sit at the front of the entire EAS system.

While I would encourage everyone to invest in a radio that can operate without electricity, the reality is that the car radio is often the only source of power and news for many in times of emergency. AM radio's presence in cars and its resilient architecture help ensure that listeners will not lose access to emergency alerts during a time of crisis. This role cannot be replicated by other communications media:

- Unlike the internet and cell phone service, radio stations continue to function during power outages, natural disasters and other emergencies, providing critical updates and information to the public. Wireless Emergency Alerts are not as reliable in these situations, as cell towers can be damaged, or the networks are often overwhelmed by high call volume.
- AM radio stations can broadcast emergency information in multiple languages, ensuring that non-English-speaking members of our local communities receive crucial updates, regardless of the language they speak.
- AM radio broadcasts do not require listeners to opt-in or sign up for alerts (unlike cell phones), ensuring that vital information is available to everyone. In contrast, Wireless Emergency Alerts may only be received by those who have compatible devices. And finally, Wireless Alerts are dependent on the user electing to receive the notification.
- Wireless alerts are limited to 360 characters, so can only provide limited information. These alerts almost always suggest the public "tune to local media" for more information. Radio can share more crucial details and actionable information, such as how to stay safe, when the storm will pass or where help is located.
- Radio stations provide a human voice on the line to help those impacted by the disaster.

I want to share a personal story about AM radio's crucial role in times of need. In June 2009, when I was the general manager of a group of radio stations in Rockford, Illinois, I was returning home with our 11-year-old daughter. She noticed the sky glowing to our south. A few minutes earlier, a CN freight train traveling at roughly 40 mph had derailed at a highway crossing through a suburb of Rockford. Nineteen cars were derailed. The cars were carrying two million gallons of ethanol. When it derailed there was an explosion. Many of the derailed tank cars leaked, some exploded, and their contents caught fire. The fire spread to several cars stopped on the road at either side of the crossing. Sadly, many people were injured and a life was lost that day.

Within about 15 minutes of the derailment, our radio stations were broadcasting emergency alerts and coordinating with local officials about how to direct nearby residents to safety. We directed listeners to our AM station, WNTA, which broadcasted critical information throughout the evening from a mobile site adjacent to the emergency command center.

Many factors contributed to managing this catastrophic situation. As bad as it was, the impact of the train derailment would have been much worse were it not for the efforts by local emergency management that acted responsibly and quickly. But I can also say that radio – specifically AM radio – played a very important role that evening. The on-air staff of WNTA-AM were the ones directing people to safety. A text message on a cell phone doesn't do what AM radio did that night.

V. Safeguarding AM Radio's Presence in Cars is Critical to Public Safety

Because AM radio stations often become a lifeline to communities in times of crisis, and because the car is often the only source of power and news for many during such times, having AM radio in cars is critical to public safety. Despite this, certain

automakers have removed AM radio as a feature on electric vehicles and signaled that they may remove AM radio from new models of internal combustion engine vehicles in the future.

A bipartisan group of more than 100 U.S. Representatives recently sent a letter to these automakers, emphasizing the importance of AM radio, especially from a public safety perspective, and noting that, among other things, alternate arrangements could be made to prevent signal interference. We would like to thank Chairman Latta and Rep. Greg Pence for leading that letter, and the following members of this subcommittee for joining: Reps. Rick Allen, Troy Balderson, Gus Bilirakis, Kat Cammack, Tony Cardenas, Buddy Carter, Debbie Dingell, Neal Dunn, Lizzie Fletcher, Annie Kuster, August Pfluger, Tim Walberg and Randy Weber. These lawmakers are leading the charge to keep AM radio in automobiles, and their bipartisan voices are helping to shine a light on the need to retain this critical service.

Local broadcasters were pleased to see that as a result of this letter and other engagement by policymakers that Ford Motor Co. recently announced that it would be reversing course and including AM radio in its 2024 model year vehicles. The NAB applauded this decision – along with its clear demonstration that any interference or business challenges can be solved – and called on other automakers to follow suit. However, the letter responses that you received indicate that some automakers will continue to prioritize their business interests over public safety.

A bipartisan legislative solution has also been recently introduced. Similar to numerous other safety features in passenger vehicles, the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act (H.R. 3413, S. 1669) would preserve AM radio in automobiles by requiring the

Secretary of Transportation to issue a rule under which motor vehicles made or imported into the U.S. would be required to include an installed device, as standard equipment, which can receive AM radio, including analog signals, and play AM radio content. The bill would also ensure that AM radio is conspicuous to the driver in the dash, and in the period between enactment and prior to the Transportation Secretary issuing the new rule, require motor vehicles that do not include AM radio to be labeled as such to consumers in a clear and conspicuous manner. Broadcasters wholeheartedly support this legislation, which preserves AM radio's vital role in our nation's public safety infrastructure.

VI. Conclusion

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. America's broadcasters are extremely proud of the role we play in serving your constituents. We applaud this subcommittee's attention to the value of AM radio and recognition of its vital role in the lives of tens of millions of Americans.

I look forward to answering your questions.