

APPENDIX



NEW JERSEY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND FOOD SECURITY

November 17, 2025

Dear Chairman Zwicker,

Thank you, Chairman Zwicker, Vice Chair Ruiz, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak today and for holding this important hearing on the future of public broadcasting in New Jersey.

This issue is not just professional for me, it is personal, as I know it is to so many families out there. For nearly a decade, I devoted my career to children's media, especially in the area of early education. For so many children—and even America's newcomers—public television is their first classroom.

The non-commercial, free, and universal access to research-backed content goes far beyond the screen. Just a few examples of public media's partnerships include Public the Department of Defense to assist military families with separation and loss with FEMA on emergency preparedness and disaster recovery. And it takes on difficult, defining life issues — death, divorce, disability, all the while teaching tolerance, inclusivity, and resilience.

These are subjects you won't find the Cartoon Network feeling morally or socially obliged to tackle, but public broadcasting does — fostering learning and prosocial development that form the next generation. In those roles, I had the privilege of seeing firsthand the real difference public media makes in the lives of children, especially those in underserved communities.

I have met parents working night shifts or multiple jobs who told me that *Sesame Street* was more than a show, it was a trusted partner in their child's early development and a critical educational lifeline. For families who can't afford private preschool or expensive streaming services, public television is often the only consistent source of educational content in the home.

It teaches letters and numbers, yes, but also kindness, resilience, and how to navigate the world. NJ PBS continues that mission here in our state. It provides free, high-quality programming that helps children learn and connects communities. It tells our stories, covers our local news, and reflects who we are as a state. And it does all of that without asking families to pay a subscription fee.

Losing NJ PBS would mean losing one of the few places where every child, no matter their background, has access to the tools they need to succeed. It would mean fewer trusted sources of local news, fewer educational resources, and fewer opportunities for connection in a time when we need them most.

Without NJ PBS, New Jersey loses: coverage of our towns, schools, and elections; a watchdog in the Statehouse, local reporting during crises and storytelling that reflects who we are as a state. New Jersey is sandwiched between two major media markets in Philadelphia and New York, a distinct New Jersey

station ensures coverage of news that matters most to New Jersey residents, and a watchful eye on what's happening right here at the Statehouse.

I'll close with a thought from someone I had the honor of representing before Congress and the White House—Fred Rogers. In *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, he said: "Television has the chance of building a real neighborhood out of an entire country." That is what local public broadcasting does, and that is why I am here once again in this fight—to keep that neighborhood strong, informed, and truly local.

Thank you again for your time and for your commitment to this issue. I look forward to working together to protect this essential service for the people of New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Aura K. Dunn
Assemblywoman, District 25

Monday, November 17, 2025

Written Testimony to the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee

Chris Daggett, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium

Good afternoon, Chairman Zwicker, Vice-Chair Ruiz, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Chris Daggett, Board Chair of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit that funds organizations dedicated to building and sustaining local news and information, with a focus on marginalized and news desert communities. I am speaking today from nearly 45 years of public policy experience in New Jersey, including 15 years of working to restore and build local news capacity in the state. As we all know too well, local news outlets across the country have been decimated over the past 20 years as the advertising business model that supported them has collapsed.

The Consortium was created in 2018 through a bipartisan effort of New Jersey residents and the State Legislature, led by Assembly Majority Leader Lou Greenwald and former Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, making New Jersey the first state in the nation to create a publicly supported initiative dedicated to building and strengthening local news outlets. Today, five other states are currently working to pass similar legislation because of New Jersey's leadership.

Since receiving its first funding in 2011 and including FY26 that began on July 1, the Consortium has received a total of \$16 million in state budget appropriations. To date, we have awarded nearly \$11 million in grants across 18 counties. Just under 50% of our grantee organizations are BIPOC-led. We've provided 132 grants since inception and currently have over 40 active grantees, who collectively have published 9,065 stories, 3,856 of which are ethnic, BIPOC and Spanish language generated. In addition, 1,271 New Jersey residents and high school, community college, and university students have been trained in documenting public meetings, reporting, storytelling, or journalism. And we have helped build an effort to eradicate one of the largest local news deserts in the state – Salem County.

Now, with the termination of negotiations between WNET and NJ Public Broadcasting Authority over a new programming services contract, New Jersey faces the prospect of public television going dark on June 30th of next year. Rather than seeing this as a potential loss, we should view it as a rare opportunity to develop a network of collaborative news outlets by and for New Jersey, where, for the first time, we will no longer be under the control and in the shadows of New York and Philadelphia media organizations. This network should be governed by a non-profit board and in collaboration with New Jersey's universities, where workforce development and the journalism pipeline are a key focus and studio capacity is abundant. Its structure and operations should be informed first and foremost by a statewide visioning process

that includes input from a wide variety of stakeholders, including residents, policy experts, legislators, and business, cultural, and community leaders, among others.

A reimagined New Jersey local news ecosystem must be sustainable, collaborative, and accessible to every resident. It should include trusted hyperlocal newsrooms, legacy media, broadcasters, investigative journalists, and local storytellers to expand reporting capacity, share resources, and ensure that high-quality, trustworthy, cultural, educational, and public service news and information reaches the public. Programming should include New Jersey-focused local news, education, the arts, public affairs, community activities, high school and college sports, State Legislature and Supreme Court proceedings, and civics, to name but a few.

A comprehensive solution to this issue includes long-term stable funding from a combination of public, private, and philanthropic sources and a clear mandate to prioritize the public good and ensure that trustworthy, equitable, widespread, and comprehensive coverage of all towns and counties is provided. The many and varied communities of the state should have the opportunity to be heard, represented, and informed, especially in this age of increased misinformation and polarization.

New Jersey must work toward establishing a resilient and inclusive local news ecosystem that supports local reporters and newsrooms, fosters civic engagement, and provides residents with reliable information on issues that directly affect their day-to-day lives. Creating a well-resourced, independent, and forward-looking news, entertainment, and cultural affairs entity focused on collaboration will ensure that all residents in New Jersey have the tools they need to engage with and participate in their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present comments. I look forward to working with the Legislature and New Jersey Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to develop a network of collaborative news outlets and broadcasting by and for New Jersey - not New York - not Philadelphia - New Jersey.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Testimony of

Montclair State University:

Dr. Keith Strudler, Dean, College of Communication and Media

For the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee

November 17, 2025

Chair Zwicker, Vice Chair Ruiz and Members of the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Keith Strudler, and I serve as dean of the College of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the future of public media in New Jersey.

When WNET announced in September that it would cease operating NJ PBS, many saw it as a crisis. We see it differently. We see an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine what public media can and should be for New Jersey in the 21st century.

For more than a century, universities have been a backbone of public media in America. Today, more than 50% of NPR's member stations and nearly 50 PBS television stations are affiliated with colleges and universities. From the launch in 1953 of the nation's first university operated public television station at the University of Houston to the University of Florida's model of combining education with community service in their College of Journalism and Communication, these partnerships demonstrate that universities can and do successfully operate public media — advancing their critical mission of public service and education and adhering to the highest ethical standards of journalism that are ingrained in their very constitution.

This community of universities have built a powerful and stable coalition of public service, furthering their distinct missions while also supporting each other in collective best practices. Furthermore, unlike virtually any other institution—public or private—our great universities do this while also training the next generation of journalists, storytellers, and media professionals. There will be no better way to ensure the future of news and media in New Jersey than by having its future workforce learn from the professional standards of NJ public media.

Montclair State is uniquely positioned to lead this effort in New Jersey. Our College of Communication and Media is nationally recognized for excellence in journalism, media production, film and television, strategic communication, sports media, and communication studies. Our faculty and staff bring decades of experience at the highest levels of industry, including experienced broadcast news executives, journalists, film makers and documentarians, sports broadcasters, and much more – in addition to

technical and engineering experts who are well versed in the operations of linear television and new and emerging media.

For those efforts, our College and the work of our students and faculty continue to be awarded nationally. In just the past several years, the College has earned two Edward R. Murrow Awards, three national Student Emmy Awards, several Marconi nominations, and a comprehensive list of regional and national accolades. We have also taken initiative in building and operating student driven media, including our NewsLab news program, WMSC Radio, the Montclairion Newspaper, Hawk Communications Agency, and being the first College of its kind in the nation to launch and manage its own streaming platform. The College also hosts the Center for Cooperative Media, which supports the NJ News Commons network of more than 330 local news organizations across the state — through which we will seek to build a network for the public station. We are also the home of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, which has invested more than \$10.8 million in local journalism and civic information projects since 2018.

Our physical home is a 105,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility that includes significant production space, including 4K and high-definition studios and control rooms, flexible film soundstages, a dynamic multiplatform News Lab, a multifaceted audio production center, plus mediated classrooms, a 188-seat presentation hall with full production capabilities, animation and editing labs, and specialty rooms. The College also has continued to upgrade its facilities to meet the moment of evolving media consumption, including launching a nimble VMIX digital broadcast studio and Center for Strategic Communication that enables data driving social media listening and analytics capabilities.

These facilities have been a cornerstone of the College's growth and also why a growing number of studios, networks, and production companies select Montclair State as their location to shoot films, narrative streaming content, and news broadcasts. Montclair State is a valued partner of the growing media production ecosystem in New Jersey, making us fully prepared to manage the production logistics of NJ public media in a professional, cost efficient, and forward looking manner. Additionally, we have formed valuable collaborative partnerships, including our ongoing collaboration with WNBC and Telemundo 47, as well as serving as an academic member of the NBCU Academy program.

The public media model of the past served New Jersey well in his time, but the media landscape has changed dramatically – and continues to do so. Today's audiences consume content across multiple platforms. They expect deep engagement in addition to traditional broadcasting. They want to see themselves and their communities reflected in the media they consume. And they want to interact, authentically, with the media, using social and digital media for engagement. These are the cornerstones of what we do, teach, and study at Montclair State.

At the same time, the market underpinning journalism has largely collapsed in the United States over the last 20 years. Indeed, NJ PBS was impacted by that downturn, which has included rounds of layoffs. And we are all well aware of the significant challenge to the broader news economic model, which has seen the closure of many newspapers, significant layoffs and downsizing of news networks, and ongoing

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consolidation of ownership in for-profit media. We believe that a moment like this, Montclair State provides a stable, transparent, new pathway forward. We will rebuild a new business model for NJ public media that reflects today's environment and better anticipates the future.

Our vision is for a public media system that is truly local and community-rooted—one that leverages partnerships with stakeholders across the state and includes a dedicated focus on training young people. A system that amplifies the incredible hyperlocal, nonpartisan journalism already happening in communities from Sussex to Cape May. A system that welcomes and promotes the diverse voices and creators across New Jersey's rich cultural tapestry. One that informs, listens, and entertains, using a powerful linear broadcast in addition to social, digital, and audio production to meet communities where they are.

We're not planning to do this alone. We're building a broad coalition of universities, media organizations, civic leaders, cultural institutions, and community stakeholders. We are actively speaking with representatives, faculty and staff from Rowan University, The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Rutgers University, Stockton University and others to explore what we could build together. We plan to engage closely with WNET, which will continue operating NJ Spotlight News. We're hoping to help plan and learn from public listening sessions across the state to hear directly from New Jerseyans about what they want and need from public media. This coalition approach reflects our commitment to ensuring that reimagined public media serves all of New Jersey—north, central, and south—instead of a particular region or demographic. So while Montclair State aspires to be the operational home, NJ public media will give voice to a broad range of publics.

Montclair State University is ready to lead this effort. We have the infrastructure, the expertise, the partnerships, and most importantly the commitment to public service that this moment demands.

We also believe that engaging with Montclair State to lead this effort would create critical fiscal efficiencies. Montclair State already maintains facilities and studios, engineering and technical staff, the personnel experience, and broadcast and digital production technologies to operate a network. We also already have other critical items needed for public media infrastructure, including fundraising and development operations, HR functions, and workplace infrastructure that will allow us to confidently operate on Day 1, ensuring NJ does not risk its public media going dark.

Perhaps more to the point, Montclair State can run this station more cost effectively than a start-up or a singular board hoping to outsource aspects of production and operations in a highly decentralized model. We are a much lower business risk than a start-up, and we can absorb costs that many others couldn't or wouldn't.

As we are reminded of often, American universities are perhaps the nation's most stable and enduring institution, built on a foundation of truth, independent and inclusive voice, and public service. Montclair State is proud of its 130-year history and its promising future; we stand prepared to ensure the sustenance of NJ public media through this next contract and beyond.

New Jersey public television has a long tradition of having very strong journalism at its core, and we intend to keep it that way – with transparency and free of outside influence. Building on the well-established and documented standards used by other university public stations across the country, Montclair State will establish strong, publicly available ethical standards that will be reviewed annually, relying on code of ethics already established by organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists. The College of Communication and Media teaches our students the highest standards of ethical journalism, a critical lesson in the face of a complex professional media ecosystem. Our operation of NJ public media will proudly carry on this imperative, including developing systems for potential ethical violations to be flagged easily internally or externally. And of course, Montclair State is a public institution that is accountable to public records requests – providing additional guardrails and transparency that other potential operators would likely not have.

The stakes are high. If New Jersey loses its public television programming, even for a short time, we would be the first state in the nation to face such a loss following the federal government's defunding of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. We cannot let that happen. We have a chance to build something better—a model that other states might look to as they navigate their own public media futures in this rapidly changing landscape. One that takes advantage of New Jersey's strong assets and ensures not only an enduring, cost-efficient public media, but also prepares the journalists and media professionals of the future.

We're asking for your support as we develop a comprehensive plan to respond to the anticipated RFP from the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority. We're asking you to see this not as the end of NJ PBS, but as the beginning of something better for all New Jerseyans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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**Written Testimony Submitted to New Jersey Legislative Oversight Committee
by Mark Magyar, Director, Sweeney Center for Public Policy, Rowan University,**

November 17, 2025

My name is Mark Magyar, and I serve as Director of the Sweeney Center for Public Policy at Rowan University. I have been representing Rowan University on the large ad hoc working group that has been meeting formally and informally to discuss how to save public broadcasting in New Jersey.

I am here today primarily as a public policy analyst who can provide the perspective of a New Jersey journalist, recognizing that reporters can't testify before Senate committees. I spent 30 years as a journalist in New Jersey, and I have spent over 15 years working in nonprofit journalism. I was one of the original reporters for New Jersey Spotlight, I spent eight years running New Jersey Reporter magazine where I faced the same fundraising challenges Scott Kobler faced, and I worked with the Corporation for New Jersey Local Media to transition the state's largest remaining weekly newspaper group to nonprofit ownership.

As a former deputy executive director for the Senate Democratic Office and as deputy policy chief for Republican Governor Whitman, I also understand the challenges you face as legislators and the internal debates that have gone on over the years over the role of state government in public broadcasting.

We need to understand how and why we got here.

Governor Hughes established the Public Broadcasting Authority in 1968 to create a New Jersey public broadcasting network because New Jersey was one of only two states in the nation that did not have local TV news broadcasts on CBS, NBC and ABC.

In 2010, New Jersey was providing an \$11 million annual subsidy to New Jersey Network when Governor Christie made the decision to sell off New Jersey's radio licenses to WYNC in New York and WHYI in Philadelphia and contract with WNET in New York to run the TV broadcast as NJTV. Christie later sold off the spectrum for two of the state's four broadcast licenses as part of an FCC auction for wireless companies seeking to expand mobile broadband to generate a \$325 million "one shot" plug for the FY2017 budget.

When New Jersey Spotlight was acquired by WNET and merged into NJTV to form NJ Spotlight TV News as NJPBS, it looked like a good move financially for both, and -- most

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important -- a very positive development for New Jersey news, public knowledge and civic engagement. The merger added the in-depth expertise of New Jersey's most important public policy-focused news organization to the state's trusted statewide TV network and created an on-line web page that is the go-to news source for anyone interested in not just the "who, what, where," but also the "why" of public policy. In an era of major newsroom budget cuts, their in-depth work is essential.

So, let's talk about why we're here today. As usual, it comes down to money – in this case, a double hit.

President Trump's successful push to eliminate \$1.1 billion in federal funding for public broadcasting this summer upended WNET's finances and came on top of a \$750,000 cut in New Jersey's \$1 million operating subsidy to NJPBS, as recommended in Governor Murphy's budget.

The budget crisis exposed a fundamental problem in the original Christie decision: Transfer of New Jersey's public TV station to WNET in New York handed over fundamental decisions about the future of New Jersey public broadcasting to New Yorkers whose principal focus was the future of their New York public broadcasting network – the very situation Governor Hughes wanted to avoid when he created a New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority.

New York management made a series of budget cuts – understandable considering its dire fiscal straits – that eliminated a number of key New Jersey staffers, without consulting New Jersey Spotlight's leadership or giving the NJPBS Board a heads-up so they could go out and try to raise money to avert the most egregious cuts. That round of cuts left NJ Spotlight TV News without an experienced health reporter in the midst of a congressional shutdown focused on the impact of healthcare cuts, and previous layoffs had eliminated the expert energy reporter whose insights would have been invaluable in the just-concluded gubernatorial campaign. A TV reporter eliminated in the cuts was the staffer who had been doing the most work in South Jersey, and it looks like there will be more studio and less live coverage in the future because of budget constraints.

In late September, shortly after those cuts were announced, WNET and the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority announced that they were ending negotiations over a new agreement to start June 30, 2026, for WNET to continue operating NJPBS. Three ranking members of the NJPBS Board resigned, including Scott Kobler and Tom Bracken who are testifying before you today. WNET has publicly committed to maintaining the news broadcast and New Jersey Spotlight after June 30, but details are sketch and their financial pressures will only get worse.

So where do we go from here?

A large ad hoc working group representing the former NJPBS Board, universities, news producers and advocates met last month to discuss solutions, and as I am sure you have been hearing, there are competing visions and perspectives.

Senators Zwicker and Burzichelli, your determination to do a “top-to-bottom” analysis and to highlight the issue through today’s hearing is vital, and we are grateful to Assembly Majority Leader Greenwald and Assemblywoman Dunn for their bipartisan support.

Let me offer a few guiding principles for what we need to do to ensure the future of a New Jersey public broadcasting network that incorporates New Jersey Spotlight’s capacity for in-depth reporting and analysis:

1. New Jersey Spotlight TV News needs to be a New Jersey entity with a New Jersey board dedicated to New Jersey interests. Fortunately, the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority retained the TV broadcasting license, but WNET currently owns New Jersey Spotlight. Given its fiscal challenges and its commitment to the public interest, WNET should be encouraged to transfer NJ Spotlight TV News, its website and archives back to whatever New Jersey entity emerges.
2. New Jersey Spotlight TV News needs to be managed as an independent news operation with its own board free from interference. Regardless of where the new public broadcasting entity ends up putting its broadcasting studios, with Montclair State University offering a very attractive option, the news operation has to be a 501c3 nonprofit totally separate and insulated from any government entity. To quote one of my former bosses, Governor Christie Whitman, “control of the media went out with Pravda,” or so we had hoped after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
3. New Jersey Spotlight TV News needs to be truly statewide in its coverage. Rowan University would be interested in providing an adjunct studio, editing facility and office as a base for South Jersey coverage for the new public broadcasting entity. South Jersey will never get the same quality and level of coverage if news editors constantly have to decide whether it’s worth sending a reporter two hours away.
4. New Jersey Spotlight TV needs a financial commitment from the State. At a minimum, the new entity needs to be able to count on the estimated \$3.9 million a year generated from the tower leases that has been given to WNET to support its broadcast operations in recent years, and Governor Sherrill should restore the \$1 million subsidy. Without an understanding of what the State commitment will be, it would be difficult for any entity to respond to a future RFP.

5. New Jersey Spotlight TV needs to be moved from WNET to the New Jersey-based 501c3 nonprofit news entity. We don't need two competing public TV news operations. New Jersey Spotlight TV News plays a vital role in New Jersey's news ecosystem, it has been very successful in raising grant funding from New Jersey sources for its New Jersey coverage, and its archives need to be part of the new operation.
6. New Jersey Spotlight TV needs to focus on New Jersey programming. There is no need to run Masterpiece Theatre or duplicate the programming on Channel 13 in New York and Channel 12 in Philadelphia. In addition to the varied New Jersey programming currently being provided, we should take this opportunity to reimagine broadcast, streaming and online options to provide greater coverage of state and local news, major conferences, legislative hearings, high school sports championships and cultural events, and provide a forum for independently produced films and documentaries that showcase life in our state. New Jersey's media landscape has been growing and diversifying, encouraged by organizations like Montclair State's Center for Collaborative Media and the Civic Information Consortium, and we need to incorporate new media programming into our plans by partnering with university- and community-based news organizations.
7. Time is of the essence in developing a pragmatic plan to continue New Jersey Spotlight TV's operations after June 30, 2026. If new Public Broadcasting Authority legislation is needed to move a solution forward, we need to put it together in the next few months.

We look forward to working with you to develop a solution that makes public media in New Jersey stronger and more effective than ever.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The future of public media in New Jersey

Background briefing and agenda

Executive summary

In a rapidly changing media landscape, the announcement in September 2025 that NJ PBS could close in June 2026 was quickly met with resolve: the collapse of WNET/PMNJ/NJPBA negotiations to continue programming New Jersey's public television station led to action and is seen as a real opportunity by a growing group of stakeholders.

If NJ PBS closes, New Jersey would be the first state in the nation to face the total loss of local public television following the federal government's defunding and pending closure of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Montclair State University, the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, former members of the PMNJ board and others quickly began to build a broad-based coalition to develop a plan to respond.

The goal is clear: Reimagine public media in New Jersey – television, radio, and local news outlets – to meet the present and future needs of residents across the state in a time of major digital disruption and information overload.

Public media in New Jersey used to be strong, trusted and influential. It can be remade for today's moment as a highly collaborative, networked, local and community-rooted endeavor that leverages partnerships with multiple stakeholders and a youth-focused component to train the next generation of media professionals. It could also showcase and amplify the many newsgathering and content-producing activities already under way across the state in local, county, and state government, arts and culture, youth sports, and travel and tourism, to name just a few.

The move to act is urgent: A coalition should aim to have an outline of a draft plan by the end of the year and a more detailed plan in 1Q of 2026, in order to respond sufficiently to what is expected to be a reissued programming RFP.

Background + history

Immediate background

New Jersey's public television system faces significant changes as the state's partnership with WNET comes to an end on June 30, 2026 after 15 years of programming contracts.

This past March, the NJPBA issued a request for proposals to find a new programming provider for NJ PBS. Public Media NJ, Inc., a New Jersey nonprofit corporation of which WNET is the sole member, was the sole bidder. Negotiations for a new programming and services agreement (PSA) broke down last month. Additionally, the state had cut NJ PBS funding from \$1M to \$250K while the Corporation for Public Broadcasting withdrew approximately \$1.5M in support. As a result, PMNJ will cease operating NJ PBS when the PSA expires next June, though it will retain the digital news product, NJ Spotlight and continue its daily news broadcast on WNET and other platforms.

In response, the state indicated it would await direction from the incoming administration before taking further action, likely including a new RFP process. WNET has expressed willingness to provide services on a reasonable basis for whoever becomes the next programming provider on a transition plan for NJ PBS.

For reference, the key requirements of the previous RFP included:

- Broadcasting 20-25 hours of New Jersey-centric programming on a weekly basis
- Broadcasting a daily newscast
- Broadcasting of the governor's State of the State and budget addresses and election night returns

Beyond NJ PBS, New Jersey's public media landscape includes other initiatives. The state established the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium in 2018 as an independent nonprofit organization to provide grants and back office and operational support to local news outlets, particularly in underserved communities.

History

The New Jersey Public Broadcast Authority (NJPBA or the Authority) was founded in 1968 to address a long-standing issue: New Jersey's lack of dedicated news coverage due to its position between the New York and Philadelphia media markets. It is an independent state authority that manages the physical, electronic, and intellectual assets of New Jersey's statewide educational television network.

As the FCC license holder, NJPBA ensures these assets are used to serve and inform the people of New Jersey. Created by the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority Act of 1968, NJPBA operated New Jersey's public television assets for more than 40 years as New Jersey Network (NJN). NJN began broadcasting in 1971, then, after PMNJ entered into the first PSA with the NJPBA, as NJTV starting in 2011. New Jersey is the only state in the nation without a major commercial network station based and operating in the state.

For decades, the State of New Jersey provided NJN with substantial funding—at one point more than \$30 million annually (equivalent to roughly \$60 million in 2024 dollars), covering studio costs, staff salaries, and benefits. The Foundation for New Jersey Public Broadcasting, a separate 401(c)(4) supporting organization, also raised additional private support. At its peak, NJPBA employed 219 full-time staff, with up to 40 more at the Foundation.

In 2010, the Legislature passed the New Jersey Public Broadcasting System Transfer Act, carrying out the Christie administration's plan to outsource public broadcasting operations. The Transfer Act reorganized NJPBA's operations to improve efficiency, restructured its board, and sold the state's nine radio licenses, four to WHYY in Philadelphia and five to WNYC in New York – while explicitly prohibiting the sale of its television licenses.

In 2011, New Jersey launched NJ PBS (originally NJTV) through a public-private partnership between Public Media NJ, Inc. (PMNJ) and the NJPBA. PMNJ, a New Jersey nonprofit wholly owned by New York's WNET, which was selected via competitive RFP as the new programming provider for NJPBA's television network. WNET and NJPBA entered into a five-year Programming and Services Agreement (PSA), effective July 1, 2011, with two five-year extensions.

WNET subsequently purchased NJ Spotlight, the state's most trusted news source for public policy and together with NJTV has produced the nightly news and public affairs program, *NJ Spotlight News* since March 2019.

The PSA authorizes PMNJ to operate NJ PBS and produce statewide public television content and services. NJPBA ensures the programming meets the state's educational mission and includes coverage such as:

- *NJ Spotlight News*
- Live broadcasts of the Governor's State of the State and Budget Messages
- Coverage of elections and other civic events
- Cultural and educational programming for New Jersey audiences

Under the PSA:

- NJPBA retains title to the FCC licenses and maintains all transmission facilities.
- PMNJ provides 20–25 hours of New Jersey–focused programming weekly.
- NJPBA also passes through certain non-state revenues to NJ PBS, including grants and lease income.

In FY 2025, NJ PBS received roughly \$6.5 million in public funding, consisting of state pass-throughs of \$3.9 million from leasing revenues from its television towers, \$1.4 million from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, \$200,000 from the NJ Food Network, \$1 million from New Jersey's general fund, and \$900K million from NHK (the Japanese national television network)—about 54% of its \$11 million operating budget.

The remaining half of NJ PBS's budget comes from foundation grants, corporate underwriting, and individual member donations.

The Authority maintains nine key broadcast sites statewide. Its towers are shared by numerous public safety and government agencies and, in part, leased to commercial users such as mobile carriers, generating additional income.

Overview of current media ecosystem

New Jersey's news ecosystem is undergoing one of the most dramatic transformations in the nation. Wedged between the dominant New York and Philadelphia media markets, the state has long faced fragmented coverage and underinvestment in truly local journalism. (Benjamin Franklin's description of New Jersey as "A barrel tapped at both ends" could well describe our media landscape.): Over the past two decades, those structural weaknesses have collided with the collapse of traditional advertising-based business models that once supported newspapers, television, and radio. The result is a dual story—of steep decline and inventive rebuilding.

The Center for Cooperative Media counted 688 news and information providers in New Jersey in 2025—the vast majority of which are small businesses—including 288 local newsrooms that produce content at least biweekly.

The decline of legacy media

New Jersey was once home to a robust network of local media institutions that informed communities, held power to account, and connected residents across the state. That infrastructure has eroded rapidly.

- **Newspapers:** The Star-Ledger, once the state's newspaper of record, endured successive layoffs since 2010 and ended its print edition in 2025, transitioning to an online-only format. That move also shuttered The Jersey Journal, a 157-year-old daily that relied on The Star-Ledger's printing operations. The Record, sold to Gannett in 2016, has been consolidated and downsized as part of national cost-cutting.
- **Public broadcasting:** In addition to the history noted above, recent state and federal cuts have put the network on even more precarious footing, underscoring the vulnerability of public media to shifting political priorities.
- **Shrinking coverage:** The number of journalists covering the New Jersey State House has fallen from 44 in 2000 to about 20 today. National research ranks New Jersey 49th out of 50 states in local journalists per capita—just 5.1 per 100,000 residents. Thousands of municipal meetings and civic issues now go uncovered, leaving residents with limited access to independent information about local governance.

This contraction has weakened public accountability and eroded civic connection and engagement in many communities.

The rise of new models

Amid this decline, new organizations have emerged to fill the gaps through innovation, mission-driven work, and community engagement.

- **Nonprofit newsrooms:** NJ Spotlight stands as the state's largest nonprofit newsroom, supported by major foundations and corporate underwriters. New Jersey Monitor (founded 2021) covers statehouse and policy issues as part of the national States Newsroom network. A wave of newer outlets—including The Jersey Vindicator, Ridgeview Echo, Public Square Amplified, The Trenton Journal, Slice of Culture, Two River Times, and New Jersey Hills Media Group—is experimenting with community-focused nonprofit and hybrid models.
- **Hyperlocal for-profits:** The TAPinto network includes more than 90 locally owned franchises statewide, providing a franchise digital news platform that empowers community entrepreneurs to report on their towns.
- **Growth of community media and community-rooted news products:** Organizations such as Hopeloft and training programs such as Documenters and Blue Engine are building new kinds of news and information products and services across New Jersey.
- **Training the next generation of media professionals:** High school and college newspapers, journalism certification programs in community colleges, and university student internship programs are providing young people with new opportunities both to develop reporting skills and participate in imagining new models to serve the local news and information needs of New Jersey residents.

Political and business news remain strong niches, with Politico, Insider NJ, New Jersey Globe, ROI-NJ, BINJE and NJ Biz (all for-profits) each serving specialized audiences.

Cable and streaming outlets including News 12 New Jersey and ONNJ continue to offer broadcast updates, though their local depth varies widely across regions.

There still is a contingent of print media serving the state, including such chains as Gannett, Community News Media, New Jersey Hills Media Group, Star News Group and others.

Ethnic and community media: trusted but undersupported

While many traditional outlets have struggled, New Jersey's ethnic and community media (ECM) sector has expanded quietly but steadily. Between 140 and 160 such outlets now serve the state's diverse residents—a rare area of growth in an otherwise contracting field. They are often small, family-owned, for-profit operations that operate on limited budgets but enjoy deep trust and cultural fluency within their audiences.

Roughly 85% of these outlets publish or broadcast in more than 15 languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, and Korean.

The crucial role of philanthropy

Philanthropy has become a central pillar of the state's rebuilding effort. The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC)—created by state legislation in 2018—is a nationally recognized model that blends public and private funding to support civic information projects. The Consortium has distributed more than \$10.8 million to 75 projects in 19 counties, funding local newsrooms, information tools, back office operations, training programs, and community media initiatives.

Major foundations such as the Community Foundation of New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund, and Knight Foundation have also played key roles in sustaining local journalism. RWJF's \$1 million grant to Hopeloft to develop local outlets in South Jersey marks one of the largest single philanthropic investments in community news in state history.

These efforts represent both innovation and necessity: without philanthropic and public-sector intervention, New Jersey's information infrastructure would continue to deteriorate.

Overall, New Jersey's media system is in flux—marked by loss, experimentation, and resilience. The traditional anchors of public information have weakened, but new players are emerging with nonprofit models, community-driven missions, and

collaborative approaches that redefine what “local news” means. Sustained public and philanthropic investment, coupled with stronger support for community and ethnic outlets, will be essential to ensuring that every New Jerseyan—regardless of geography or background—has access to trustworthy, relevant, and independent local information.

The opportunity

As stated above, the goal is clear: Reimagine public media in New Jersey – television, radio, and local news outlets – to meet the present and future needs of residents across the state in a time of major digital disruption and information overload.

Using a coalition-approach

A diverse and influential coalition of leaders from across New Jersey's media, academic, civic, and legal communities, led by Montclair State, can chart a new course for the state's public media system. The group will include experienced journalists, educators, nonprofit executives, media producers, and policy experts—individuals whose collective expertise spans public broadcasting, higher education, news innovation, public issues, and community engagement.

Together, the coalition can develop a comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-looking plan to build a stronger, more equitable, and community-rooted public media future for all New Jerseyans.

NEW JERSEY PUBLIC BROADCASTING AUTHORITY

Overview of Assets, Operations, and Funding

MISSION OF THE NJPBA

The New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority ("NJPBA" or "Authority") is an independent authority of the State of New Jersey that acts as custodian and manager of the physical, electronic, intellectual content, and Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") license assets that comprise a statewide educational television network. The Authority also works to ensure that these assets are maintained and employed to benefit the people of New Jersey.

Originally created by the "New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority Act of 1968," the NJPBA was established and operated for over 40 years as New Jersey Network ("NJN"). The Authority was reorganized through the New Jersey Public Broadcasting System Transfer Act ("Transfer Act") to develop a more efficient and effective model for serving the State. In accordance with the Transfer Act of 2010, a restructuring of New Jersey public broadcasting was accomplished, including a reconstitution of the NJPBA board, the sale of radio broadcasting licenses, and the outsourcing of a substantial portion of the television operations. Under the Transfer Act, the sale of the State's television licenses is specifically prohibited.

CURRENT OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Effective July 1, 2011, the NJPBA entered into a Programming and Services Agreement ("PSA") with Public Media New Jersey, Inc. ("PMNJ"), a New Jersey not-for-profit corporation and subsidiary of WNET, to provide public television programming and services on the network, which operates under the name of NJ PBS and online at mynjpbs.org. The NJPBA works to ensure that PMNJ provides high-quality, non-commercial programming that serves the needs and interests of the citizens of New Jersey and furthers NJPBA's educational objectives.

Programming includes a weeknight news and public affairs program, live broadcast of the annual New Jersey State of the State and Budget Messages, live coverage of New Jersey elections, and other public affairs and events coverage, as well as cultural, educational, and inspirational programming.

Pursuant to the PSA, NJPBA transferred (i.e., outsourced) the programming, production, fundraising, promotion, and similar functions of the former NJN television network to PMNJ, while NJPBA, as FCC licensee, remains responsible for: (1) operating and maintaining the broadcasting infrastructure (including, but not limited to, the broadcasting towers and equipment, statewide interconnection, monitoring, etc.); and (2) complying with the Federal Communications Act, all FCC and CPB legal and regulatory requirements, and all other federal (e.g., Federal Aviation Administration) regulatory requirements.

The current PSA expires June 30, 2026, and a new management partner or operational plan will be required to be in place on July 1, 2026.

NJPBA ASSETS

Broadcasting Infrastructure

The NJPBA is the FCC licensee for stations WNJT(TV) Trenton, WNJB(TV) New Brunswick, WNJN(TV) Montclair, WNJS(TV) Camden, and television translators in Sussex, Hackettstown, and Belvidere. These stations are maintained and operated to distribute non-commercial educational programming as a statewide network. There are a total of nine locations throughout the state where the NJPBA has major responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the broadcast infrastructure.

Tower Infrastructure and Revenue Generation

The NJPBA tower infrastructure serves dual critical functions: supporting station operations while providing platforms to numerous federal, state, and local public safety and governmental agencies, generally rent-free, representing nearly \$1 million in donated services to government agencies annually. Additionally, the NJPBA generates revenue by leasing tower space to commercial entities for mobile communications, data networks, and broadcast services.

Critical Emergency Services Role

The NJPBA plays a crucial role in disseminating life-saving information during emergencies to the 28 million residents within the range of its broadcast signals. As a chief steward of the Emergency Alert System, NJPBA stations are a primary distribution point for all federal, state, and county emergency alert messages transmitted in New Jersey. The NJPBA's EAS responsibility is outlined in the New Jersey State Emergency Communications Plan, which is administered by the New Jersey State Police Office of Emergency Management.

Due to the Authority's extensive broadcasting infrastructure and emergency power capabilities, NJPBA has been designated as New Jersey's primary entry point for federal emergency alert messages. The State of New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness lists the broadcast facilities as critical state infrastructure sites. Additionally, NJPBA supports the FCC's Disaster Information Reporting System ("DIRS") by providing operational status and restoration information during major disasters to aid subsequent recovery efforts for the region's communications providers.

Regulatory Compliance Requirements

As an FCC licensee and recipient of federal grants, the NJPBA is obligated to comply with a variety of federal regulations. These regulations encompass a range of requirements such as maintaining continuous broadcasting, ensuring a sufficient number of staff members are present, holding all meetings related to the licensee as open public meetings with at least seven days' notice, and maintaining financial records that are accessible to the public. Additionally, to remain eligible for CPB Community Service Grant ("CSG") funding, the NJPBA must annually confirm its adherence to all FCC and CPB requirements. Some of these requirements will be reduced in the coming years after the dissolution of CPB.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Historical Funding Context

When the restructuring of public broadcasting in New Jersey was accomplished in Fiscal Year 2012 under the New Jersey Public Broadcasting System Transfer Act of 2010 ("Transfer Act"), State appropriations for the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority ("NJPBA") were reduced by 72%.

This reduction also impacted federal funding, since the funding formula for the annual Corporation for Public Broadcasting ("CPB") Community Service Grant ("CSG") was based on non-federal funding raised two years prior to each award. For this reason, the CPB grants in Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013 were relatively stable, but CPB funding reduced by nearly 50% in Fiscal Year 2014.

PMNJ Funding

The NJPBA collects and turns over to PMNJ certain revenue streams that were committed to their continued operational support as a part of the PSA. At the time of our last completed audit (FY24), these totaled approximately \$5.5 million, and were comprised of:

- Annual CPB CSG: \$1.6 million (discontinued in FY26)
- Spectrum lease proceeds: \$2.3 million
- Tower rents: \$1.3 million
- Cable channel contract proceeds: \$200,000

A state budget appropriation provided an additional \$1 million to PMNJ in FY23, FY24, and FY25. This amount was reduced to \$250,000 in FY26. Financial forecasts for the current year indicate that these revenue lines will continue in similar amounts, except as noted.

Under the PSA, PMNJ was responsible for additional fundraising responsibilities to support the contracted services. Fundraising revenue has been relatively flat for several years.

NJPBA Broadcast Operations Budget

The cost to the State for the operations of the NJPBA broadcasting infrastructure is approximately \$2.4 million per year. This is provided through budget language that allows Treasury to transfer funds for this purpose. The current operating budget is detailed in Appendix A.

SUMMARY

The NJPBA holds significant assets serving both broadcasting and critical public safety functions. The Authority's infrastructure reaches 28 million residents and serves as the state's primary entry point for federal emergency alerts. With the current PSA expiring June 30, 2026, and changing funding dynamics including CPB elimination and reduced state appropriations, the Authority faces important decisions regarding future operational models while maintaining its essential broadcast infrastructure and emergency services capabilities.

Appendix A

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET OF THE AUTHORITY

REVENUES

ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	FISCAL YEAR BUDGET
NJ State Allocation	
TOTAL	\$2,449,000

EXPENDITURES

ACCOUNT DESCRIPTION	FY26 PROPOSED BUDGET
12-Salaries	560,000
21-Printing and Office	6,000
24-Household & Clothing	1,000
25-Utilities	312,000
30-Travel	1,000
31-Telephone	125,000
32-Postage	3,500
34-Information Processing External	60,000
35-Household and Security	4,500
36-Professional Services	688,000
38-Other Services	4,000
39-Information Processing Internal	20,000
40-Maintenance Buildings & Grounds	226,000
41-Maintenance Equipment	367,000
45-Rental Central Motor Pool	7,000
47-Rental Other	14,000
76-Other Equipment	45,000
77-Information Processing Equipment	5,000
TOTAL	\$2,449,000

24x