
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY OVERSIGHT, REFORM, AND FEDERAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

“This is an excerpt from the Assembly Oversight, Reform, and Federal Relations Committee meeting of June 15, 2026, discussing the recently announced selection of Montclair State University as the new operator of New Jersey’s public television stations ”

LOCATION: Committee Room 11
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: June 15, 2026
2:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Alexander “Avi” Schnall, Chair
Assemblyman Cody D. Miller, Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
Assemblyman Gabriel Rodriguez
Assemblyman Erik K. Simonsen

ALSO PRESENT:

Thomas M. Kelly
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide

Frank Marshall
Assembly Majority
Committee Aide

Diego Romero
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide



Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

Alexander "Avi" Schnall
Chair

Cody D. Miller
Vice-Chair

Gabriel Rodriguez
Maureen Rowan
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NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE
ASSEMBLY OVERSIGHT, REFORM AND
FEDERAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY OVERSIGHT, REFORM AND FEDERAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

FROM: ASSEMBLYMAN ALEXANDER "AVI" SCHNALL, CHAIRMAN

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - JUNE 15, 2026

The public may address comments and questions to Thomas M. Kelly, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Charlene L. Mazone, Secretary, at (609)847-3870 or e-mail: OLSAideAOF@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Assembly Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations Committee will meet on Monday, June 15, 2026 at 2:00 PM in Committee Room 13, 4th Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, New Jersey.

The committee will hear testimony from the public and invited speakers concerning the recently announced selection of Montclair State University as the new operator of New Jersey's public television stations.

The following bill(s) will be considered:

A1662 Drulis/Freiman/Miller	Permits certain winery license holders to sell wine produced by other winery licensees under certain circumstances; establishes supplemental wine production facility license.
A2550 (1R) Bagolie/Speight/Morales	Requires continuation of health benefits dependent coverage for certain children with disabilities who are 26 years of age or older.
A3946 Karabinchak/Venezia/Park	Requires emergency medical technicians and firefighters to receive training concerning electric vehicle fires.

(OVER)

Assembly Oversight, Reform And Federal Relations Committee

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June 15, 2026

A5013
Freiman/Simmons

Allows sale of ice cream and other frozen desserts infused with certain alcoholic beverages.

Issued 6/10/26

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For changes in schedule due to snow or other emergencies, see website <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us> or call 800-792-8630 (toll-free in NJ) or 609-847-3905.

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ASSEMBLYMAN ALEXANDER “AVI” SCHNALL (Chair):
OK, good afternoon, everybody. Can I please ask everyone to rise as we do the Pledge of Allegiance?

(Pledge of Allegiance recited)

Thank you. Attendance now.

MR. KELLY (Committee Aide): Assemblyman Simonsen.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Here.

MR. KELLY: Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Here.

MR. KELLY: Assemblyman Rodriguez.

ASSEMBLYMAN RODRIGUEZ: Here.

MR. KELLY: Vice Chair Miller.

ASSEMBLYMAN CODY D. MILLER (Vice Chair): Here.

MR. KELLY: Chairman Schnall.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Here.

MR. KELLY: You have a quorum.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK, thank you. Welcome everybody; we have a pretty packed agenda today.

We're going to start with the hearing -- discussion only -- on the recently announced selection of Montclair State University as the new operator of New Jersey's public television stations. We have several people that are here today to testify. And, we're going to call a few people at a time.

Phil -- I'm going to spell the last name so I don't pronounce it incorrectly -- Phil A-L-O-N-G-I -- CEO, New Jersey Independent Public Media. Brenda Flanagan, please come up; and, Maddie Orton. OK.

PHILIP ALONGI: Thank you, Assemblyman, and members of the Committee; thanks for the opportunity to speak today.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Phil, you've got to put your mic on, OK.

MR. ALONGI: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Over here, red means "go" in Trenton.

MR. ALONGI: Great.

My name is Phil Alongi; I'm the CEO of New Jersey Independent Public Media. I'm also a New Jersey broadcaster and journalist who spent more than 20 years in this industry, including serving in leadership roles at NJTV where I oversaw the news and the program development for the station, and I was one of the primary architects behind the creation of the current Newark Gateway Studios. I've dedicated much of my career to telling New Jersey's stories and serving New Jersey's audiences.

I'm here today with one very simple request: Please slow this process down and give the additional review that a 15-year decision deserves. When the Authority announced its recommendation, we were disappointed, but we respected the process. In fact, first thing I did was call some of my colleagues at Montclair State University to congratulate them and wish them well; some of whom are behind me here. When the Authority announced its recommendation-- I'm sorry, excuse me. But, since then, we've had an opportunity to review the selected proposal in detail, and we've learned that significant facts have changed since the bids were submitted and evaluated. Most notably, NJ Spotlight News has been dismantled, and the Gateway Studio in Newark has been closed. Yet, a substantial portion of the selected

proposal relies on a continuing relationship with WNET, and the continuation of NJ Spotlight journalism. That alone raises legitimate concerns that deserve answers. There are other questions as well, questions about newsroom staffing; questions about digital operations; questions about editorial independence; questions about governance; questions about whether the resources that are identified in the proposal are sufficient to deliver what New Jersey residents have been promised.

I'm not asking the Committee to choose NJIPM today; I'm asking whether you have enough information *today* to confidently commit to New Jersey's public media future for the next 15 years. Fortunately, there's no emergency requiring that this decision be made immediately; in fact, WNET has agreed to continue operations through September 30. Service to viewers will continue uninterrupted, so, we have the luxury of time. The Transfer Act gave you, the Legislature, a review role for a reason. It's recognized that there may be circumstances where additional scrutiny is warranted before publicly owned broadcast assets are entrusted to a new operator. The Public Broadcasting Authority took nearly two months to make a recommendation. It's my view that the Legislature may want to take more than the 15 days that you have. This is not about who wins; it's really about making sure that New Jersey gets this right. I respectfully urge you all to exercise your authority to require additional review and to ensure that all outstanding questions are answered before this decision becomes final. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you.

B R E N D A F L A N A G A N: Good afternoon, and thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. It actually feels a little strange for me to be sitting here.

(laughter)

I retired from NJ Spotlight News after decades of covering New Jersey, and now I'm "Mimi" to two little grandkids. So, I love that job, but, I'm back here today because I'm deeply concerned about the future of public broadcasting in New Jersey. That's why I filed a letter of protest; I sent up a procedural flare -- I guess you could say -- hoping to get your attention to request that you please take a closer look at this proposal. You see, at the top of its game, our news show operated independently, keeping viewers informed about the Legislature; election nights; debates over critical issues impacting New Jersey; and statewide crises like the COVID pandemic and Super Storm Sandy. We offer programming on arts, history, neighborhoods, and culture. We posted content on digital and social media platforms. And, Michael Aron -- God rest his soul -- helped guide viewers through Jersey politics.

So, you see what's at stake here. Done properly, public broadcasting is a big job. After New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority picked MSU's bid, I tried to envision how they would do that job; cover the entire state; and, frankly, I didn't see a plan that looked robust enough to handle the task. MSU relies on a very small staff of three reporters and one anchor, plus some student interns, and, yet, some companion news organizations. There's no Trenton correspondent. I'm not sure whether the nightly show will be live, and the social media digital component apparently won't go online until year two. More than that, I'm worried about the

appearance of conflict given the organizational chart, for the Montclair operation goes through the University right to the State. And, I'm not accusing anyone at MSU of potentially putting their thumb on the political scale; far be it from that. But, I believe that, basically, as State employees, it would be harder for MSU to quell suspicions or accusations of influence. Basically, I think this comes down to money, also. MSU's proposal is by far the less expensive of the two bids, and I think that's perhaps what helped to sway the Authority to go that route. I can understand the State's frugality at this point. Yes, I know, money is very tight, but, in this case, the cheaper choice is not necessarily the right one. I know the proposal from NJ Independent Public Media carries a heftier price tag -- I realize that -- but it's also a more comprehensive and thorough plan. It comes with more public media programming, management, and distribution expertise. They're offering a live nightly news show; a State House correspondent; and, a South Jersey Bureau. The IPM bid's well-staffed; it's detailed; and it's ready to go right out of the box; and -- this is crucial -- it devotes significant resources to social media and digital platforms, and you know where people are getting their news nowadays.

I've spoken about this with colleagues and friends, and they've pointed out how so many newsrooms are going dark. CBS Radio is gone; 60 Minutes is under siege. We need to support vibrant local news coverage. Here in New Jersey, there are ongoing efforts to keep local news alive, and that's good. And, I think the Legislature has other funding options to explore. I like the idea of asking Hollywood filmmakers to contribute to public television. So, please, take another look at this. Bear in mind, as Phil pointed out, it's a five- to 15-year commitment. So, I think it's worth a little extra

time to get it right before you check the box, because New Jersey residents need and deserve professional, balanced, and robust public broadcasting that is relentlessly focused on the Garden State.

I thank you for your time, and now I'm going to go be "Mimi."

MADDIE ORTON: Good morning-- Am I on?

Good morning, thank you for having me. My name is Maddie Orton, and I was a broadcast journalist at NJPBS from 2013 to 2017, covering the arts and culture as well as assignment stories, general assignment. When I think of PBS, I think of one of the last places that *everyone*, regardless of income or location, can enjoy all arts and culture, and hear about the important stories and issues that impact their lives. Montclair State University's proposal will only staff a three-reporter newsroom, and that means a loss of field-specific expertise and contacts.

The NJPBS newsroom over the years has been filled with what I would call "de facto beat reporters." Michael Aron, of course, was the Dean of the State House; I covered arts and culture; Briana Vannozzi, now anchor, has a deep knowledge of healthcare, the economy, and Trenton. Brenda Flanagan, Senior Correspondent, covered policy issues on a range of topics. And, Joanna Gaggis has covered education and energy issues. A three-person newsroom, in my opinion, is not sufficient to cover the state. It means that the top three stories in all of New Jersey will, by necessity, overshadow everything else occurring: your local school board and education; the environment; health and human services; transportation; law and order; veterans' affairs; key elections. This includes local initiatives, with respect, your initiatives. It is not just democracy that dies in darkness, though, it's also local businesses; it's your local theater company; it's members of the

tourism industry that our state brags about and relies on so heavily in these summer months. A three-person newsroom means if a story is not already being covered by hyper-local news outlets at this moment in time, I do not see how it will be covered moving forward.

I was blessed to have worked in NJPBS's newsroom when I did. Money and resources were always tight -- it's PBS -- but we were happy and able to do our jobs. In the four years that I worked in the newsroom, I covered well over 100 different arts and culture organizations, many of them more than once. I made sure that local -- that cultural practices across our diverse state, like the annual Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Powwow, Ukrainian Pysanky, Flamenco, and (indiscernible) folk art were all spotlighted. That number doesn't include stories on related topics, like historic preservation and film and TV tax credit, arts education. The best part of my job was knowing that I was making a difference, especially as arts and culture coverage became more and more of an endangered species. Thanks to NJTV News, organizations had video and storytelling to generate tickets and send to funders. They relied on this, and it has not been easy as coverage has continued to decrease.

I have been vocal about my concern over journalistic independence in Montclair's proposal, but I also want to take a moment to speak to one of the many positives of New Jersey Independent Public Media's proposal, about which I am uniquely qualified to speak about. Working under Phil Alongi as a journalist, I was never once pressured to cover a story to appease funders. I was never *once* told to cut something for fear of ruffling feathers. Montclair State University has said that one way that their team will strive for journalistic independence, despite being an entity of the State,

is having a code of ethics. I can assure you that a code of ethics is as good as the paper it's written on unless you have leaders in place to ensure it. Phil is willing to make tough calls to guarantee the firewall between journalists and funders stays firmly intact. He's been involved in news one way or another since he was a kid learning under his dad at NBC, and it's in his blood. He's a team player, a visionary, and probably the hardest-working person I know. As the arts reporter, I can tell you that journalism is a lot like live performance. It's stressful and the pay isn't great; but, if you love it, you've got to do it. And, that's why Phil is here.

Finally, as you know, this is a unique procurement process, and it does not rely on a vote of approval from the Legislature, but that is what this 15-day period ending on June 22 is for. A decision is made solely by the executive branch, in my understanding. And, that will go into effect without state representatives needing to know the basics of these proposals. But, I assure you that the effects of this five- to 15-year decision will be felt by all of us. Please hold a vote to disapprove the contract, and not to prevent this bid from going through, but just to pause the process, gather information, and make sure you and your constituents will have reliable coverage of all of New Jersey for years to come. Thank you very much for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you; thank you to the panelists.

Phil, can I ask-- What percentage, would you say, from revenue that came in over the last 10 years were from donations?

MR. ALONGI: From the entity now? NJPBS?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Yes.

MR. ALONGI: Yes.

It was about -- I'm estimating here -- but I think it was about--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I'm not going to hold you to it, don't worry.

MR. ALONGI: Sure, that's OK.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: A guesstimate.

MR. ALONGI: It was a combination of Federal funding -- which, you know obviously was cut--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Yes.

MR. ALONGI: --There was a small amount of State funding as well.

Then, there was underwriting and donations; membership that was probably somewhere in the field of \$3-\$4 million at its peak, something like that.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Which was what percentage of the total?

MR. ALONGI: Of the full revenue of the budget?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Yes.

MR. ALONGI: Probably be about 30% or 40%.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: So, 30%, 40% came from donations?

MR. ALONGI: From donations and underwriting.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: And, underwriting.

Could you clarify to us-- You're saying how there's a concern about independence because of a -- for a State university. Why would I not have that same concern knowing that a third of the revenue is coming from

underwriting and donations and donors, and perhaps important donors, or influential donors-- Why would there be a differentiation with the two?

MR. ALONGI: Yes, you're right; if I could speak frankly, Assemblyman, I think the best model--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Please speak frankly.

MR. ALONGI: That's all I do; I'm from Jersey, you understand.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: That's right.

MR. ALONGI: The best model here is if -- is if it's a completely independent board, and there's complete independent funding that is literally just coming from the members whom it's serving; 100%.

It's not realistic at this moment. But, one of the tasks that I said we would need to take up day one, is to make sure that we're never in this position again. PBS has been following some very old -- many of the stations -- are following many old models that put us in this situation to begin with. I would love to not have any State funding; any Federal funding; any underwriting; and have this be a subscription model with membership. That's the way we can ensure our own destiny. And, in the plan -- if you have a chance to look at it -- it has a multi-year (indiscernible) we're slowly and methodically relying less and less on the State underwriting so that we can control our destiny.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Got it, thank you.

MR. ALONGI: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Any questions?

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: So, you mentioned the RFP process, and one of the comments that you had made was you would like an additional review.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I just went through an RFP process, and I was on calls this morning about it, where they submitted competitive bids; they were reviewed; and the contract is going to be awarded to the person who was, essentially, the top score based on the criteria that was set through the RFP. So, I know you raised some concerns about independence, budget, staffing, et cetera. In terms of the RFP process, obviously it's a competitive process where it's reviewed by individuals; they make the selection based on a key variety of different factors. And, what you're telling us here today is, you don't agree with the process; you have some concern. So, from your perspective, what would an additional review look like? It's been-- Everyone submitted their proposals; they've had an opportunity to raise concerns, questions. For us, what would that request look like? Is it us meeting with the administration? I just would like to know, because when you say you wanted additional review after a competitive process, what does that additional review look like to you?

MR. ALONGI: Yes, yes, that's a great question, Mr. Vice Chair.

And, I think that Number 1 for me, on my list of why this needs more review, is that when MSU's bid was submitted back in April I presume, there were assumptions that are not true today. Specifically, listed in their proposal is a reliance on WNET to provide NJ Spotlight News that they would air. But, WNET since then has shuttered the entire operation. Everybody's been terminated or been told that their last day is September 30, and the studio is gone. So, the first question for me was, that's kind of a material difference now, and what you said, how you were going to present news. So, I think at the very minimum, we need to say, "Hey, let's take a step back. You now need to replace this giant hole in your bid. How are you

presenting daily news product now that WNET is not going to be providing that for you?" To me, that means that there is money that needs to be spent; there's resources; there's expertise to be able to replace that product, that, right now, we have not seen in the proposal.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: And, then, the final question that I have from me.

So, you mentioned journalistic independence. It's a known fact that I work for a public institution, and the one thing that we preach is that we want our students, faculty, and staff to have the ability to be able to express their views independently. I mean, that's why you're a part of going to a college or an institution, because you want to have independent journalistic thought. You want people to be able to express their concerns without fear of retribution or trying to benefit. And, obviously, schools have the same types of policies with conflicts of interest, and not doing things that benefit yourselves. So, can you elaborate a little bit more on why you feel that a public institution wouldn't have that same level of independence when that's what these institutions are supposed to be open access where students can express their thoughts and concerns, employees can as well? I just want to -- I'm not trying to be critical -- but, when someone says to me, "independent journalism," and then they say that you don't think that's going to happen in a public institution, it raises a flag for me to say, "Well, why do you feel that way?"

MR. ALONGI: Yes.

Yes, I'm going-- It's just extremely difficult-- First of all, I want to say that New Jersey is really unique in that there is not a single commercial broadcaster in the state. We only-- We're relying only on New York and

Philly. So, there's an outsized responsibility to get this right, now with us. To have the one state broadcaster, that's under the umbrella of a Governor-appointed board, leaves me a lot of concern. It's not that I think there's anything nefarious with President Koppell or Governor Sherrill, but university presidents come and go; governors come and go; and, it's a lot of extra pressure for these journalists to be able to speak truth to power; have transparency and accountability in mind when the people that they're reporting to are put in place by that same government. And, so, I've always thought from the beginning of this process, the best path forward is for us to be working hand in hand with MSU. I said before, I have great respect for people at MSU. Stefanie Murray, who you'll probably hear later, has blazed a trail with the Center for Cooperative Media that's a national model. She's an incredible journalist; has built something incredible. Adam Goldberg was our engineer when we broadcast NJTV News at MSU, and is a great, decent person. There are great skills and resources at MSU, but MSU is a higher ed. institution; it is not a broadcaster. And, it should be feeding a separate, single-purpose entity, in my view, so that no matter what happens in the future, no matter who the president is, there's never a time where they can get up and say, "Why are we investing so much in public media on campus? Why are we investing these resources? We're a higher ed. institution." And then, they pull back. The only way we can ensure that is if we're in control of our own fate by having something that is specifically single-purpose entity. NJN didn't have it; it was under the umbrella of the State. NJTV did not have it; it was under the umbrella of 13. I saw firsthand that decisions that were made at NJTV were always known to be under what's best for the overall

organization, which was 13. I think New Jersey needs to have its own say in its destiny.

MS. ORTON: With respect, may I add to that, as well?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Yes.

MS. ORTON: Thank you.

I would also add that because Montclair State University is a higher ed. institution primarily -- and, this falls under that umbrella -- Montclair State University, as its own higher ed. institution, is reliant on the State for \$220 million, in their last allocation. The Governor appoints the board that oversees Montclair State University, and therefore, the college in which this newsroom will be run. And, the Legislature, obviously, is quite involved in the budget. So, if the Governor and Legislature are both involved in the budget that the University is heavily reliant on, and the board is appointed directly by the Governor, I don't see how that would not create hesitation around objectively monitoring the Governor and Legislature. And, I will add that, from a journalistic perspective, it's not even about whether interference ever ends up occurring; there will always be the patina of potential interference, because there is awareness of how that works.

Additionally, I did just want to address the RFP as well. Brenda did a lot of work using her information. You all have copies of her protest letter, as well as the evidence packet. The evidence packet directly addresses the criteria within the RFP and creates an apples-to-apples comparison. So, I think that this allows you to sort of look at the RFP and those criteria elements directly.

Thanks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I just have some clarifying questions.

How is it currently-- We talked about under the RFP, it would be the Board of Governors would be appointed by the Governor. How is it currently functioning? How is the Board of Trustees-- Where do they come from?

MR. ALONGI: It's a separate independent board of different community and business leaders; philanthropically there's 12 leaders in the State.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: And, how would they apply? What's the selection process?

MR. ALONGI: I couldn't tell you with any certainty.

I know that there's-- There're different recruitment efforts, but it's completely separate from the State, there are no appointments.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Gotcha.

My second question is, we talked about the committed hours that's in the RFP of six hours of New Jersey focus. How many hours do you currently focus on all of New Jersey?

MR. ALONGI: At NJPBS now?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes.

MR. ALONGI: Do you know that off hand?

MS. ORTON: I can take that.

I mean, I did look through, as well; we've all kind of been chatting about this. In the current week, I believe, if you were to look at this past week or the week before, it was 19.5 hours, that includes reruns. At the height of programming before several slashes had been made, I think it was

closer to maybe 25 hours. It should be in the evidence information packets, but it is not dissimilar from either proposal, frankly.

MR. ALONGI: The proposal I put forward called for 26.5, I think.

MS. ORTON: And, that includes reruns, and the original program, I think, is around-- I forget when; it's higher than that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much. That's all I have, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK, thank you guys, thank you.

MR. ALONGI: Thank you for your time.

MS. ORTON: Thank you.

MS. FLANAGAN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I'm going to pull up Jeff Jarvis and Carol Cronheim, I think the name is.

OK, I apologize if I pronounced it wrong.

J E F F J A R V I S: Mine's easy, I'm Jeff Jarvis.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Yes it is.

OK, Jeff.

C A R O L C R O N H E I M, Ph.D.: Oh, well thank you.

I don't want to be too repetitive of what's already been said--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Just hit the button.

Thank you.

MS. CRONHEIM: Oh, sorry.

All the technology has changed since I was a young staffer here.

Good afternoon, thank you for giving me this opportunity to comment on this proposal. My name is Carol Cronheim, and I have worked

and lived in and around Trenton for many decades. I had the pleasure in the 1990s of working in the Governor's Office of Policy and Planning, and at the Department of State. And, in both of those places, I worked closely on matters connected to our former State live broadcast network NJN. Since NJN's demise, the entire media landscape in the state and, indeed, in the world has completely changed. What hasn't changed is that New Jersey is still in the shadow of New York and Philadelphia media. And, coverage of the important work you do here is practically nonexistent, despite the noble efforts of many hardworking reporters in our state; and, I have lived along this border -- Delaware River border -- between Monmouth and Hunterdon and Mercer for 40-plus years. And, there are more Phillies fans than even Mets or Yankees in the town I live in. And, as you know right here, you're much more likely to trip over an Eagles fan than a Giants fan, and there's really very little understanding of Central Jersey and the Capitol of all of New Jersey, but also, Central New Jersey is Trenton. And, that's where I feel a tremendous amount of neglect. As a former legislative staffer as well, I find the timing of this proposal particularly troublesome, problematic. Since the awarding was done June 3, and what I just heard, the RFP came in in April, so it was pretty fast. You're in the middle of your busiest legislative season of budget season, and it's very hard to focus in on other issues. The way the original transfer legislation was written, as I'm sure you know, I think inadvertently cut the Legislature out of the process. Like I said, as a former legislative staffer, I find -- and, executive branch -- it's a little problematic that you don't really have a say. As you know at this point, you're really -- your only move to have some agency over this decision is to disapprove by June

22 from both Houses, and that's a very short window, indeed, to have you all look at such an important issue for statewide coverage of New Jersey.

And, I'm not here to argue for either proposal, I really don't have a horse in this race. My main concern though is that New Jersey doesn't rush entering into a long-term contract that will impact our citizens' ability and right to be informed about what's going on in our state. Perhaps there are even policy alternatives that no one has thought about yet. And, maybe it's time to take a second look before we grant an RFP and see, is there a better way to do this in New Jersey? As we know, Spotlight News will continue through September 30. So, while the deadline seems like it's July 1 in short, I think there's a little bit of breathing room for you all to have your say and impact what's going to happen here. So, my request is that you just slow the process down and take control of the outcome. And, I very much appreciate your time today, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you.

MR. JARVIS: Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity.

I'm Jeff Jarvis; I'm a resident of Basking Ridge for many years. I am the emeritus Tow Professor of Journalism Innovation Activity. I'm the Director of the nonprofit that operates NJ Hills Media. And, I'm the Former President and Creative Director of Advance.net, at which I was responsible for launching NJ.com. In my research, I studied mass media's death and what will replace it. I come in support of Montclair State's plans, for I see a tremendous opportunity to reinvent public media as the *public's* media, built in on the unique strengths of Montclair State's existing structure of support for the vast, diverse, and growing ecosystem of independent news providers

across the state. This is a New Jersey model that is being studied and copied across the nation. I have testified in praise of this model that Montclair State has been doing in -- to legislatures in California, Oregon, and Illinois. Rather than trying to extend the life of a dying medium, Montclair State will create a vibrant, innovative network of voices from across New Jersey, together with the fresh perspectives of students in the state's universities. Providing them, by the way, with new career opportunities. Montclair State's plan is fiscally conservative and realistic, unlike the other plan, especially given the present state of American media, which I study. While Montclair State's plan is also collaborative, inclusive, inventive, and forward looking, and, in terms of any discussion of how big the plan is at the start, it will only grow. It is, again, a fiscally responsible, smart way to start and then get going from there. I find others' testimony questioning Montclair State's independence, frankly, ridiculous and offensive. As a journalist and as an academic, I have to say that I've never met reporters or professors who take orders well.

(laughter)

Finally, I commend the State's authorities for selecting Montclair State's bid. Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you very much; any questions from the Committee?

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: Just one, it's a brief one.

So, Mr. Jarvis, you had mentioned that other states are actively pursuing something like this or have some form of this structure. You said California, Oregon, and Illinois. So, is this model the model in other states?

MR. JARVIS: When we're talking about the New Jersey model, we talk about the combination of Montclair State Center for Cooperative

Media, plus the consortium -- Civic Information Consortium -- sorry, and the work that's gone on.

Montclair State has built, over the last more than decade, a network of support for the independent news providers in New Jersey, large and small, old and new. That's what I refer to as the New Jersey model. Adding public media into this, I think, is a tremendous opportunity. And, again, I emphasize this is the opportunity to rethink public media beyond just the TV station and a few hours of programming. This is the chance to think about the public's media as a whole in the State. That's what I refer to when I talk about the New Jersey model. So, yes, there are variations on this ongoing news discussion right now in Oregon, has been in California, Illinois; Northwestern University had a university -- Northwestern -- look at similar models as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I would like to know, do you know the numbers -- how much it costs for each of those to operate their media?

Because, the New Jersey model seems very slim; but, I'm not sure what the Oregon or the Illinois or California model-- How much does it cost to operate those in comparison to ours?

MR. JARVIS: That's a question for me?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes.

MR. JARVIS: There's no one budget overall because the point is these are independent media that go as they can.

Way back when, when I started NJ.com, I remember trying to convince Debbie Galant to start a blog on NJ.com for Montclair. And, she

said, “What a good idea, Jarvis, but, why would I do it for you? I’m going to do it independently.” She started Baristanet, which became a national pioneer leader in what we call hyper-local news. And, Debbie made it work in advertising and support from her audience; it’s now part of Montclair Local; it merged in after many years of success. So, the point of this is that you don’t have one model and one newsroom for the whole state and that’s it. There are more than 300 members of the consortium at Montclair State. Each one of them seeks their independent sustainability on their own. Montclair State helps them with training and finance, and technology, and audience, and so on. We now have-- They now have a new network for shared news across that ecosystem as well, which it makes it easier for all of them. So, this is really thinking about not-- I go way, way, way back when Governor Christie sold our licenses to New Jersey and Philadelphia. And, I remember the time someone said, “Well, we need to start a newsroom.” And, I said, instead, “No, we already have an ecosystem in this state, and we need to find ways to support that ecosystem so it can grow.” That’s what Montclair State has done and will continue doing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, but you don’t have any dollar amounts to put with that; is that what I’m hearing?

MR. JARVIS: It varies tremendously.

In California, they were lucky; they have Google-owned state, and they twisted their arm, and they got some money. Oregon has no such opportunity and no money in the budget to do anything there, so it’s different in each state and each case.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I’m just-- My concern is how we grow this.

I don't-- And, you can talk about the consortium that's there; I'm just concerned that-- We have to look at it logistically. My concern is about how do we make sure we get local news? How do we make sure we have the independence that we need? How do we make sure that we are tackling the environmental justice? How do we make sure that, again, it's independent? And, so, I'm very focused on that; I'm not sure if I've heard enough. But, we have more people that are coming to testify, and hopefully I can get some more clarity around that. But, thank you so much--

MR. JARVIS: Let me just add real quickly--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes.

MR. JARVIS: --on the Board of NJ Hills Media, I see an opportunity for them to become profitable now, for the first time.

So, there are ways to do this.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: I was just going to make a comment.

It was said that it's a little disturbing that the Legislature is involved in the process. I always have an issue when there's 120 people elected throughout the state to represent the people of their individual districts, and we just bypass it altogether. So, I'm still digesting all this, but, I agree, it is troublesome and more than troubling that -- anytime the legislature is cut out of the process.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I can't say I argue so much.

Lisa Maria (*sic*) F-A-L-B-O, I believe, if I'm reading it correctly.

L I S A M A R I E F A L B O: Sorry, Kindergarten handwriting.

Lisa Marie Falbo.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Just hit the button, please.

MS. FALBO: Lisa Marie Falbo, sorry, Kindergarten writing.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: That we heard.

MS. FALBO: Nice to be with you today.

So, good afternoon, my name is Lisa Marie Falbo, and I am a proud graduate of Montclair State University, class of 2006. Twenty years ago, I walked out of Montclair with a communications degree and a dream of working in television. Today, I am the co-founder and managing partner of On New Jersey, New Jersey's only 24/7 streaming television network. In less than three years, ONNJ has become one of the most watched local streaming news networks in the country. We produce gubernatorial debates; congressional debates; election night coverage; public affairs programming; and community storytelling that reaches audiences across the Garden State every single day. And, ONNJ wasn't built with government funding. It was built by two media entrepreneurs willing to invest in local journalism. In fact, as I speak, ONNJ is live streaming this hearing so residents can watch and engage in the democratic process in real time, audio only though.

Twenty years ago, that would require a whole crew to do. Today, it requires one person in our control room, and a digital platform that can reach audiences everywhere. So, why am I telling you this? Montclair didn't just prepare me for a job. It prepared me to build something. When I look at where media is headed, I don't see the future in giant television towers. I see it in streaming; I see it in digital distribution. I see it in content creation;

journalism; innovation; and workforce development. And, I cannot think of a better institution more equipped to do that than Montclair State University. Montclair understands that the future of media is not about choosing between traditional broadcasting and emerging platforms. It is about embracing both. It's about preserving the public service mission that has always been at the heart of public television, while also evolving to meet audiences where they are today. Montclair offers a fresh start to a model that just simply doesn't work in this day and age. As someone who has spent my career in this industry, in all facets -- behind the camera; producing; hosting -- I know how difficult that balance can be. It requires vision, leadership, operational excellence, and a willingness to innovate. Montclair has demonstrated those qualities time and time again.

This opportunity is not simply about maintaining a public television station. It is about creating a model for what public media can become in the years ahead. One that is rooted in surface, strengthened by innovation, and positioned to reach future generations of New Jerseyans. As both a proud alumna and a media executive, I believe Montclair State University is uniquely qualified to lead that effort.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you very much.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Oh, Chairman, just one; just one.

And, you provide services to South Jersey as well?

MS. FALBO: All over.

All over the state.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Through the Chair, can you give us the demographics of where you've -- how many stories you've covered and throughout the state? That would be very helpful.

MS. FALBO: I would love to provide that.

I mean, I can't give it to you right now off the top of my head, but absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Through the Chair, through the Chair, thank you.

MS. FALBO: Definitely, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, thank you.

MS. FALBO: Of course.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK, we're going to call up from Montclair State University Adam Goldberg, Keith Strudler, Stefanie Murray, Al Prieto -- and, I hope I'm reading this correctly -- Althea Broomfield.

There should be enough chairs and mics.

So, the panel is yours to decide the order and how you'd like to start.

KEITH STRUDLER, Ph.D.: I'll be the only speaker, and then, obviously, we are excited to take questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Excellent.

DR. STRUDLER: Chair Schnall, Vice Chair Miller, and members of the Committee; Assemblyman Guardian, Assemblyman Rodriguez, Assemblywoman Rowan, and Assemblyman Simonsen, thank you for having me.

I am Keith Strudler, Dean of the College of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. I'm joined today by my colleagues, Althea Broomfield-Michel, Stefanie Murray, Adam Goldberg, and Al Prieto.

Two weeks ago, the state selected Montclair State University to operate New Jersey's four public television stations beginning July 1. We are honored to be chosen through a competitive process, and we believe that selection reflects the strength of our proposal, our attention to detail, and our commitment to serving the people of New Jersey.

First, let me briefly tell everyone about our plan. At its core, we will create a statewide public media network built around professional journalism, community engagement, and fiscal responsibility. We will launch by hiring a dedicated staff of 21, and grow significantly over the next five years. And, let me be clear: This is a professional network run by hired media professionals, not a student network. We will have fiscal -- we will have a fiscally conservative, balanced budget. Our five-year plan assumes zero federal funding and can balance with no additional State appropriation. It is built for the future. We will expand New Jersey-focused programming, producing more than 10 hours per week of original local content in our first year, a 73% increase over the current amount. That includes a daily live weeknight newscast; a daily news discussion program; election coverage; and expanded State House reporting. We will also livestream legislative hearings; major government events; and public forums, because, accessibility is what makes democracy real. And, we will have safeguards for independence and integrity, including a separate 501(c)(3) for fundraising; an external ethics and journalistic standards committee; a community advisory board; an editorial authority that rests with the newsroom. Those are the plans.

Now, let me briefly address some common questions. One, is whether Montclair has the capacity to do this. The answer is yes. Running four licensed television stations requires facilities, infrastructure, engineering expertise, and institutional support. Fortunately, we already have those things, including one of the nation's finest broadcast engineers, Adam Goldberg--

(laughter)

-- who has already built the technical plans to be ready day one. We are not starting from scratch, we do not need to build a makeshift studio at the expense of the State, or rent someone's personal production truck. We have studios, control rooms, production facilities, event space, and the institutional support necessary to be ready on day one. Montclair is also committing approximately \$1.2 million annually in in-kind support, including critical HR, IT finance, legal, and more. Our plan is not simply cheaper, it is actually better and more efficient.

We aren't building a newsroom of 25, or 15, or even 10 years ago. We aren't revisiting the past with an economic model that doesn't work, or a production plan that doesn't reflect how people consume media today. We followed the assignment of the RFP. We are building the network model of the present and future. We are starting lean and sustainable rather than having to get lean, something the current operator simply could not do. No one has greater interest in a healthy news ecosystem than we do. Our college is made of faculty and staff who have dedicated their lives to the study and practice of journalism media. People like Al Prieto, who worked at the peak of his profession before joining Montclair. We are literally educating the next generation of journalists and media professionals. That only works if there's

an industry for them to enter. We also recognize that no single newsroom can cover every corner of New Jersey alone. That is why our proposal builds on the work of the Center for Cooperative Media, led by the aforementioned Stefanie Murray, which, for more than a decade, has connected news organizations across the state. Our goal is not to replace local journalism, but to amplify it, creating a statewide network of trusted journalists, storytellers, and community voices. The same is true for the arts, culture, sports, and more. Our partnerships with creators across New Jersey will be a force multiplier and a national model for how public media can thrive.

Assembly members, you've likely heard that Montclair isn't doing it the way they used to do it. You know why? Because that failed, twice. That's why we're here today. We're going to listen to communities; embrace the realities of today's media landscape; and build something better. I also want to address editorial independence directly, because it's as important to me as it is to all of you. And, with all due respect, I think we're getting this question all wrong. As a long-time university administrator and media professor; someone who has spent decades as a content contributor to public media; someone who cut his teeth in large State school public media, I would argue that universities are the strongest agents for protecting independent journalism. Universities are built around inquiry, evidence, transparency, and the freedom to follow facts wherever they land without fear. But, independence will not rely on good intentions alone. We are building into the structure -- we are building it into the structure -- through independent newsroom leadership; a separate, nonprofit fundraising organization; an external ethics committee; a community advisory board; and adherence to the established public media and journalism standards. Our

reporters will be protected by the same shield laws that protect any journalist in the state. We will use guiding documents for best practices, including the Public Media Code of Integrity, and standards from the Society of Professional Journalists. Our college's daily mission is to teach ethical journalism practices for the future of this field, something faculty do with academic freedom and independence. To suggest we would then operate a network that violates these principles is hard to fathom.

Finally, let's talk about money. Some have suggested that because Montclair receives State funding, the network cannot be independent. Yet, every current and past proposal is dependent on State funding. Ours is actually the least dependent on State funding. And, remember, regardless of who the operator is, the State does and will retain a license. And, as we all know, the State has funded public television in New Jersey for decades. In fact, competing proposals-- Excuse me. In fact, competing proposals requested millions more from the State than we did, including the one from which we've heard such outrage about independence. Our proposal asks for less State funding. It relies on university investment and membership growth to build long-term sustainability. I would also note that universities have long been a cornerstone of public media in America. Nearly 50 universities operate public television stations and hundreds more operate public radio stations with integrity and independent reporting, in the north, south, east, and west, in states of all political persuasions. If universities did not provide a backbone for public media, public media would simply crumble.

And, to the critique that Montclair is incapable of both teaching students and also running a public television station: Universities do far more

than teach classes. They find cures for diseases; oversee State agricultural systems; discover secrets of our galaxy; create a sports drink for a college football team that's now found in every convenience store in the world -- and, yes I am a Gator -- and, yes, run public television stations. Those that try to demean Montclair and other universities as only capable of a singular task perhaps don't realize the jewel that is the American university system. And, on the issue of teaching, there is no better way to teach the next generation of journalists and media professionals than by allowing them to learn from, intern with, and shadow professionals working at a real public television network operating right on their campus. It's also why we formed partnerships with universities across the state -- north, central and south, public and private -- to build an awesome machine for hands-on learning, creative storytelling; and to actually engage the next generation of media professionals and consumers.

Let me close with this: New Jersey deserves a public media network that reflects the full diversity and energy of the state. We take seriously what it means to operate a public network. We welcome oversight. We intend to earn the public's trust, and we intend to build a network that serves New Jersey not just today, but for decades to come. Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you very much, Dr. Strudler, for that testimony.

There's going to be a lot of questions.

DR. STRUDLER: We got nowhere to go.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Neither do we.

(laughter)

I'll start off with just one, maybe two, and then we'll pass it along. You mentioned in your testimony that there's going to be a dedicated staff of 21 that's going to grow significantly. Can I ask you, if you can, Number 1, will that staff be ready on day one? Number 2, what's the breakdown of that staff, and particularly, how many reporters are of that staff of 21, and what are the other 18 -- or -- what are the rest of them?

DR. STRUDLER: So, I'll answer the first question; I'm very delighted to have the expertise of some of the finest journalists in the country beside me; I always come prepared.

And, so, first, yes we will be prepared on day one. We have been working diligently to get jobs posted, I believe nine jobs are already posted. We have approximately 500 applicants, and they are outstanding. And, so, we think at this moment there are a lot of people, both in this region and across the country, that really want to be a part of something like this. And, I think people that are dedicated to the future of journalism, public media, and democracy see what we're doing, and we've been really heartened by that process; we're getting a lot of calls and emails.

So, I will speak a little bit-- So, yes we will be ready. I'd like to defer to my colleagues, Al Prieto, who has been a pretty significant network for--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Can I just jump in for one second; before we get to the next part on that; July 1 is about 16 days.

DR. STRUDLER: It's coming.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: So, you have 500 applicants for nine jobs to go through--

DR. STRUDLER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: --plus another--

S T E F A N I E M U R R A Y: Mr. Chair, I spent my drive here on the phone with HR, on that topic.

(laughter)

So, I'm Stefanie Murray, it's nice to see you all, thank you for having us here. So, WNET has an extension with the State through September 30. So, we've been talking to them and talking to the State, and we've seen the contracts; we know exactly what they've agreed to, to continue doing, which is programming the stations so the broadcast station will continue, and to continue doing the newscast. So, we've already been looking at the things that we have to take over on July 1, and we're staffing up for those positions first. So, the jobs you see posted, there's nine; two more went up this morning; three more will go up, God willing, tomorrow if I can finish getting things entered in the system, and the rest will go up in the next week. So, we're going to stagger the hiring to take care of the things that have to be done on July 1. For example, the website has to be up; for example, we have to be able to take in recurring donor money, because there's a lot of people who are PBS donors right now, and WNET will not process that money anymore as of midnight on July 1. So, we've already worked out a list of the things that we *have* to do to keep the station running on July 1, and, so, we're hiring that way. So, the news team will be hired a little bit later in this cycle of hiring, probably in August, because WNET is going to continue to produce through September.

So, our current budget is based on -- I built the budget, so I'll take any and all budget questions -- we built a very fiscally conservative

budget. So, I just want to address that because it goes with the answer for staffing. So, to build the budget, we first looked at what assets we have at Montclair. We looked at what talent we have at Montclair and what people could do things. Then, we requested the budgets and structures for several other universities in the United States that operate public media. So, we could see how much they were spending and what it looked like in comparison to us. Then, third, we took the budget that Public Media Company produced -- the Civic Information Consortium commissioned them -- and Phil -- or, my colleague Phil Alongi, who spoke earlier -- he and I both had access to that budget. We did different things with it. So, I took that budget, and it was a large budget; it was pie in the sky, if we had millions of dollars in funding. But, they also did a historical analysis looking at the budgets from WNET over the last 10 years, so I had a lot of historical data.

So, I had historical data; I had what other public universities that run public media had; and then I had dollar figures from us. Then, we started talking to vendors. So, we talked to a ton of the vendors who we have to use and got real quotes and contracts. So, then, I built real quotes into the budget. So, then, we looked at how we balance it and how we grow. So, I substantially cut the revenue projections that Public Media Company made, because I wanted to be conservative. We don't want to overshoot and promise you, promise the State, that we would be able to hire a lot of people, or have to demand a huge appropriation or legislation that's not even out of committee yet to fund us. So, that's why the budget is lean and the staff starts small. But, I will tell you, we've already quite a few conversations with potential donors, one who called us over the weekend--

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Absolutely.

MS. MURRAY: --foundations and underwriters who are so excited to support NJPBS being controlled back in the state, that I'm already confident that we're going to exceed those revenue projections, and we're already in some conversations to expand the newsroom.

So, the current newsroom, right now under this very lean budget, is the three reporters, plus an anchor, plus a senior producer, plus a video editor, a couple of other producers, and the graphics editor. We're about an 11-person production team. I think that will be able to grow quicker than I budgeted for because our revenue is already looking to be fairly solid. So, I think by this time next year that number will be quite a bit higher, but I could not submit a budget to the State that was going to overshoot. So, it does-- It's what it-- It's three right now with the anchor. Like I said, I think that will be able to grow.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK, thank you.

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: And, my final question before I pass it on -- I may come back with some more -- is, how do you -- could you elaborate on how you envision covering the state; we have north, central, south.

There's a lot of nuances between north, central, south. There's a lot of nuances within north. I'm from a place called Lakewood, which, depending on where you sit in the state, some people say we're north south, or we're south central. And, there's a lot of differences throughout that state. What's your vision in being able to give the citizens a proper coverage with three people?

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

So, Chair Schnall, do you believe in Central Jersey?

(laughter)

So, that's a great question. There's a couple answers, and I'll hand it over to Al, who can explain a little bit more. So, Center for Cooperative Media, that I run, we work with news organizations across the state. Lakewood Scoop is like one of the organizations; there's Tap Intos; there's so many hyper-locals. New Jersey is a state of journalism entrepreneurs; we have a lot of small news organizations in our state. We also have quite a few nonprofits, and the number of news nonprofits is growing, and we support those folks. Also, the Civic Information Consortium has quite a few great grantees; there's a couple of them in the room right now. And, so, we have a growing number of independent news organizations that cover municipalities, or multiple municipalities.

So, our newsroom will start small, and we're going to build a network model. So, we have-- Like I said, I hope that the newsroom is going to grow and I'm pretty confident that it will probably be double or triple that size by the end of this year. So, we're going to start off with our key newsroom. Then, we're going to build partnerships, first of all, with other news organizations in the state. I hosted a call with about 30 folks last week who were interested in doing this. We've already been talking to quite a few other publishers, some of whom produced some incredibly journalism in this state. So, they will be content partners. So, we'll start with our core newsroom; we're going to build up content partnerships with other news organizations. We just launched the NJ News Wire; you can go to njnewswire.net to read a little bit about it, and that right now has more than

20 news organizations across the state that share content, videos, and photos. So, that will form the base of how we'll build that network.

Then, we're also working with other universities; we've had *excellent* conversations with the folks at Rowan, for example, about potentially basing a South Jersey reporter, or multiple reporters there; they have fantastic facilities. We have a great relationship with the folks at Stockton; Keith has had all these conversations. So, we also think that we're going to be able to leverage the universities in the state to help base some folks at and use them as other anchors for coverage. So, there's just so many great journalists across this country -- across the state -- that cover things at that municipal level, and we think this is an opportunity to give them a bigger platform, too.

AL PRIETO: So, I'm Al Prieto, if I may comment on this.

So, there are three reporters; there will be a north reporter; second reporter in Trenton. We talk about a dedicated reporter in Trenton covering the State House and government activity here. And, we will have a South Jersey reporter as well. The anchor is also a reporter. The anchor is just not going to sit there and write copy, and just be on television doing anchor pages. The anchor will be out reporting as well. So, really, four reporters as well. And, as Stefanie has laid out, the access to the Center for Cooperative Media and the other State colleges will give us boots on the ground, covering the regions that they will know best, as good as our reporters will be, they may not be able to drop into Jersey City and go cover a story if they haven't stayed there as well as a local reporter. That's the way that the business works today in my view.

The other thing that is critical is that news today is driven by video. And, local people, like the journalists, like the Center for Cooperative

Media, they are gathering video on the ground that no news organization can cover with -- unless you have 1,000 people and one in every city. So, that is critical; that helps drive the coverage. And, our reporters get perspective and context, which is what we really need in coverage these days. People are seeing on social media what's happening in the state and around the country and around the world; they need context, and our reporters will do that based with the information that they are getting from people who really know the cities that they are covering intimately on a daily basis. That's how we're looking at it.

DR. STRUDLER: Chair Schnall, just to be clear, we value and we look forward to being able to hire a larger reporting staff as we are growing our budget.

But, we were very cognizant of the assignment, and we have people that really understand the media landscape as it is, as newsrooms shut down and as budgets are constrained. What we didn't want to do was present something that was unrealistic, and then even if somehow money was found year one, we're coming back here to you saying, "We're broke." And, so, we wanted to build to the current realities of media. I think we're very-- We're serious about this idea that we want to start lean as opposed to kind of being one of the stories that you read or see on television that X newsroom has laid off Y number of reporters because of fiscal realities. We're going to build up. And, so, I think Stefanie is -- is the best in the country at kind of envisioning that kind of practice.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Yes, my question is, you have all these applicants.

Where are those-- When you hire these positions, where-- Are you narrowing it down to where they are from, or where they-- If you understand what I'm saying, because we talked about the different areas of the state, obviously. Do you-- Are you trying to hire people from different areas, or are they just from the college, or they -- throughout different regions?

MS. MURRAY: Of the roughly-- Last time I checked, it was like 470.

Of those folks, they are from all over the country. Because of employment laws, we wouldn't exclude anyone necessarily based on certain characteristics; however, we do expect our South Jersey, North Jersey, Central Jersey reporter to live in those places, and we really highly value people who know the New Jersey landscape, and we said that in several job descriptions. And, we have a lot of folks who are from New Jersey; the vast majority of those applicants are from New Jersey. But, I've been really surprised about folks from around the country who are really interested, and have put forth really impressive ideas about what they'd like to help with.

DR. STRUDLER: And, I would say that, obviously there will be some that will be based at Montclair for their techno expertise, obviously producing the live newscast, but those that are in the field will be in their geography.

And, so, and again, we are -- it's a very open--

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

DR. STRUDLER: --and transparent process, and we, I think -- there -- no one was favored for a job going in; and, so, we are heartened by

the kind of openness of the search and the folks that are -- the talent that's kind of pouring in.

MR. PRIETO: And, geographic diversity is very, very high on our list, not only our hiring, but to the people we are talking to every day when we go out and cover stories.

And, here, we-- That is very, very high on our list. And, representing every county as well is very, very high on our list as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

So, I have a few questions that are around the hiring. Under your proposal, reporters, editors, and producers, will they be employees of Montclair State? Are they a part of a union? Is that what I'm hearing here?

DR. STRUDLER: They will be employed by Montclair State University. They-- Some will be members of the union; some won't. If they're managers, obviously, they won't, if those that are not in non-managerial positions, so HR are helping us to determine who is where.

And, honestly, we think we want to provide our media professionals great jobs. And, I think there's kind of a fear and a tenor for a lot of people that work in newsrooms right now that they think every day they walk in might be the last and they don't have protection. So, we think, actually, the work environment is really, really strong. So, they--

MS. MURRAY: They will be union.

DR. STRUDLER: --will be unionized, unless they are in managerial positions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: OK.

And, from your digital content, how many dedicated digital content professionals are there -- have you budgeted for? Do we have a number amount?

MS. MURRAY: So, *every* person is a digital content producer.

So, everything that we will be working on will be digital first. The live newscast in the evenings will run on broadcast and livestream on digital platforms simultaneously. But, all of the reporters and the producers will be producing video-based content throughout the day for digital platforms. That will include the website, the app, and social media platforms. There's quite a following for livestreaming on YouTube, for example. And, so, they will all be producing. Right now, there's-- The only jobs we posted that are *only* digital content, not working on the broadcast, is the digital content producer, but *everyone* will be contributing to and posting on all the digital platforms. Because, that's where the viewers are and that's where things are moving. It doesn't make broadcast any less, but that's everyone's focus.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: But, I haven't heard any numbers.

Do we know what type of resources you would need?

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

So, there are 11 production people out of the 21.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Eleven out of the 21.

And, the budgeted amount is?

MS. MURRAY: Our total budget is right around \$7 million.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: And, that's just for the digital content?

MS. MURRAY: That's for the entire NJPBS.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Is this--

MS. MURRAY: You want me to pull out a number for just digital?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: So, my-- Is this the seven-year -- seven year -- is this the \$7 million for the whole contract?

Because, we get this all the time. We come back next year, "Oh we don't have enough. And, so, we'll ask for a change, or we need additional funding." These things haven't been projected; we didn't know that these costs were going to be here.

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: So, you're saying in your contract that this is firm for the next -- what is it -- 15 years?

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

DR. STRUDLER: I think we've actually done a 15-year -- haven't we done a--

MS. MURRAY: Yes, but we had to do a 15-year projection, yes.

DR. STRUDLER: -- we've done a 15-year budget.

MS. MURRAY: So, our budget right now, I submitted-- We submitted three budgets.

Our budget is based on the \$250,000 appropriation that's in the budget currently, and no more. The rest of the revenues come from other places.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I just want to clarify that piece for a second.

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I mean, there's a thing called inflation.

So, it cannot be that \$7 million today is going to fund--

MS. MURRAY: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: --\$7 million in 15 years.

MS. MURRAY: Oh no, it goes up.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: It does, OK, it does go up.

MS. MURRAY: So, we-- Yes.

DR. STRUDLER: Yes, yes.

MS. MURRAY: So, we budget at 5% increase every year.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Five percent increase?

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Now, could we clarify that 5% is 5% of the State allocation, or--

MS. MURRAY: No, no, no.

So, I-- So, we actually, for the 15-year projection we provided the NJPA-- I did not increase the state allocation, Chair Schnall--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: That's good to know.

MS. MURRAY: And, yes, Committee Member Reynolds-Jackson.

That stayed flat. But, our expenses we projected increasing 5% every year. Revenues are a little bit different because different categories we

project will grow differently. Right now there's a bump in people donating to PBS because of the recision; we don't expect that will continue forever, for example.

MR. PRIETO: If I could just briefly -- a quick statement on the digital part of this.

We are not looking at running the station as the broadcast is the lead part of it, and we'll do some digital stuff, too. We are looking at this completely holistically and our coverage will be both digital and linear as well. But, as we all know, linear television is fading. And, habits are changing, and we want to grow. And, the growth area of NJPBS under our leadership will be in the digital part; it won't be in the broadcast part. Because, those people are leaving no matter what we do on the broadcast side. And, so, we are committed to making digital the growth area. And, over a 15-year period, no one knows what the business is going to look like, but broadcast will not be like it was back in 1970, or 1980s, just not going to be that way. So, that's how we're planning this. And, that's how we're staffing it, and that's how we're instructing our reporters, "You're going to do both. And, there may be days where you're doing only digital because it's better on that platform." But, when they're going out and covering a story, they are going to be required to cover for all of the platforms we have. And, we're going to do a great job on the broadcast channel; it's going to be great. But, we will also be growing and just creating on digital and experimenting with new forms, and growing, and just trying to be as aggressive as possible and innovative as possible. That's the plan that we have for our news coverage.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: So, more of a hardball question.

MS. MURRAY: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: So, you had mentioned that you want to grow, and you're saying that there is a finite dollar value that is going to be associated the appropriation from the State.

You had mentioned revenue projections. So, are you telling me today that you're not going to be requesting additional appropriations; you feel comfortable based on the revenue? I know they talked about the 501(c)(3) raising funds. You feel comfortable right now that you're not going to be coming back to the State of New Jersey saying, "We can't make this work; we need an additional appropriation through Montclair State." Is that what you're saying?

MS. MURRAY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: OK.

MS. MURRAY: And, I-- If you wanted any more specifics, I can give you a couple of benchmarking data.

Do you want that?

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: No, listen--

MS. MURRAY: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: -- you answered the question.

And, then, more just for clarity, one other question then I will be done. Just want to say I appreciate that you had mentioned the South Jersey reporter. I know that we talk about news coverage across the state and sometimes South Jersey gets left out, so I'm thankful that you're talking to Rowan University. Also, want to point of note, you had mentioned that nearly 50 universities operate public television stations, so, this has worked in other states before. And, then, the final thing. There was a comment -- it wasn't a comment that was made today -- but it was in testimony that

mentioned that we can't rely on 15-20 interns to run this. And, it was mentioned that that's what you were going to do. So, in terms of the question I'm going to ask you, it's not going to be run by 15-20 interns, correct?

DR. STRUDLER: It is not.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: OK.

DR. STRUDLER: It is not.

It will be a professional staff operating this network. There are workforce opportunities that will allow our students to engage, but these are professional staffers running a professional network, just as our university partners do this all across the country.

ASSEMBLYMAN MILLER: Thank you.

DR. STRUDLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Just one more question, and actually, it goes to the Assemblyman's point.

The 501(c)(3) -- I'm sure you have (indiscernible) within the college -- but, what is that structurally going to look at? Who's going to run that? How're you going to decide who's in charge of that?

MS. MURRAY: Sure, thank you, Assemblyman Simonsen.

So, the Friends of the 501(c)(3) will be a separate entity in which Montclair will be the sole member, and it will have a board. This is a similar structure to how some several other public universities work, because it keeps all of the finances separate. And, so, that Friends group will have a board, and that board will be responsible for its oversight, which, our general counsel, Althea Broomfield-Michel, can talk a little bit more about. The Revenue Director for the NJPBS, who we will be hiring, as well as Major Gifts

Officer, and other development professionals, will the people who will be tasked with growing the donations that will flow through that 501(c)(3).

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Thank you, and two of you actually pronounced my name right, so thank you for that.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: I'm going to wrap it up with a couple of more questions.

If I'm correct -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- there's a reliance on a \$1.2 million in-kind donation from Montclair. Just a few weeks ago, I was sitting in that chair over there by the budget hearings, so it's good to be back in this room. (laughter) And, we heard many universities talk about cuts. And, what was is not now? If we're building out a budget that seems to be a tight budget -- which I appreciate; I very much appreciate a conservative budget -- which means that every piece of that budget is important. If we are relying on \$1.2 million from Montclair, what -- I don't want to use the word "guarantee" -- but, what confidence could we have going forward that when-- Let's say there's a Pell Grant cut from the Federal Government, or let's say, there's TAG funding that's cut, or there's a lot of ways how university or fundraising one year just doesn't work out well. How do we know if that money is reliable?

DR. STRUDLER: So, obviously, I won't speak for the University's overall budget; don't have that title, but, I will say, the contributions, the in-kind contributions, are really places where we're able to find efficiencies.

And, so, and redundancies in some cases. So, for example, some of that is our facilities, our studios, and so forth. Some of this is our

engineering expertise; our IT infrastructure; our budget procurement; and so forth. These are places where we're already operating, so it really is reflective of what it would take if you were to start a newsroom or a network from scratch; what it would take to do that. And, so we find-- And, part of why we truly believe that universities are kind of the backbone of public media is because they're able to leverage those infrastructures. And, again, some of them are very kind of boring -- we know legal's not boring -- but some-- I'm very excited. But, some of those things are places where we already have those efficiencies, but also some of those places, you get a multiplier effect, so, when we're leveraging our studios and we're operating the network, we have our students that are able to shadow in those operations. So, we are actually taking kind of an investment that's already been made and building a world-class media studio, and again, similarly what could happen at Rowan. What we're able to do is actually take full advantage of facilities in a way that probably we have envisioned.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: OK.

I believe that we discussed-- It was mentioned, and I was actually quite happy to hear this -- and, that is that the future is not broadcasting. Because, that's very, very accurate. And, to know that that is our focus, that the future is not broadcasting, but rather, other places is very refreshing to hear. And, I think that's a big piece of this. And, also, I'm very-- I am to like the idea of putting it onto a college campus because we are bringing in interns. Not that interns are going to be doing the job that has to be done, but they can actually learn hands on. And, it creates job opportunities, and so on, so forth, which, to me, is excellent. I appreciate that it's a conservative

budget. I appreciate that you're telling us here, on the record, that the plan is not to come back for increased budgets--

MS. MURRAY: That's right.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Which, we'll find out next year--
(laughter)

And, we'll have to have a different conversation if it doesn't follow through. But, definitely, it's definitely comforting to know that this is all put together, and the strategy and the plan with three reporters tapping into the resources that exist, with like-- It was mentioned that it's impossible for anyone to be able to fully cover 500-plus municipalities, and, everyone has their own news; everyone has their own planning boards; and their zoning boards; and board of education; and everyone's got news that's local. No one can cover that. So, no matter-- I could give you whatever number you want; I'm going to have to tap into the local media that covers the local stories, whatever I'm going to do on a statewide agency. So, once that's the case, let's create a good strategy that actually can work; that could also be affordable; that could be long term.

So, I very much appreciate you guys coming out. I appreciate us having this hearing, and this part of the hearing is coming to a close. Now, I'm going to pass some legislation.

MS. MURRAY: Thank you.

DR. STRUDLER: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCHNALL: Thank you.

(TESTIMONY CONCLUDED)