



**EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD MEETING**

**Virtual Teams Meeting**

**October 16, 2020**

**9:30 A.M.**

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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

**Marta Bechtol, Executive Director**

**Agency Operations**

The Beltline office remains closed to the public; employees continue to work remotely across the state. Employees have remained healthy and morale is generally good, but they are missing direct engagement with their colleagues. We've experienced some staff turnover due to retirements and promotions which put a lot of stress on the field staff during their busy season. Work did not slow down, however. It has been a very productive summer!

**State Budget Update**

Due to unexpected impacts of COVID-19 on the state budget, each agency has been asked to prepare for a GPR lapse in FY21. ECB has been told to plan for a \$243,500 GPR return. Instructions state that these funds cannot come from debt service allotments, nor are they to impact staff. Given that ECB's use of GPR primarily covers staff and debt service, utilities are the only other appropriation the agency can tap. After a critical analysis of utilities expenses, I've made a business decision to shut off HD All-Classical radio signals at seven tower sites effective October 16, 2020. While service reduction is never ideal, the HD shut down may actually improve regular signal transmission in the fringe areas of the impacted tower sites. Additionally, HD is very wearing on transmitters, so this will ease our equipment repair and replacement cycle as well as our capital budget draw.

The agency's biennial budget requests were submitted to the State Budget Office on September 15<sup>th</sup>. The Technical budget request did not ask for additional funding beyond standard budget adjustments. In final numbers, the agency is requesting \$12,599,500 (30%) General Purpose Revenue and \$29,997,200 (70%) Program Revenue for a combined total of \$42,596,700 over the biennium.

The Capital request presented only normal maintenance and upgrade projects for this biennium, as well as funding for three new radio stations (in the event agency applications for new licenses are approved by the FCC) for a total request of \$3,363,060.

Over the course of the last year, the agency has developed and implemented a long-range (20-year) revolving equipment maintenance and replacement cycle that will lend greater predictability to our need for capital funds. This will reduce the size of our debt load and our need for borrowing over time.



### **Federal Budget Update**

The president has signed a stopgap bill that will keep the government funded through December 11. It is not expected that action on federal budget requests that impact public broadcasting will be taken until after the election.

As a reminder, current and new requests in the following appropriations include:

#### *Labor, Health and Human Services, Education*

- \$ 175M Emergency funding for public broadcasters due to COVID
- \$ 515M Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a \$50M increase over current funding of \$465M
- \$ 20M Broadcast Interconnect, an ongoing appropriation
- \$ 30M Ready-to-Learn in the Department of Education (Every Student Succeeds Act), \$2.3M increase over current funding of \$27.7

#### *Department of Homeland Security*

- \$20M Next Generation Resilient Warning System grants, a new request

As CPB is forward-funded by two years, these increases would take effect in 2023 if approved.

### **Broadband Access**

In addition to my work on the Governor’s Broadband Access Task Force, I have also been participating in a state interagency workgroup and have established an internal public media workgroup as well. We are gaining a better understanding of state needs and resources that will help us identify where there are opportunities for ECB.

The next round of Broadband Expansion grants will close on December 1. Wherever technically possible, the agency will partner with service providers to support their applications.