



Testimony of
Naomi Wyatt, Secretary of Administration
before the
Senate Communications & Technology Committee
regarding
FY 2009-2010 Appropriation for Pennsylvania's Public Television Network
April 22, 2009 – 9:00 am – Hearing Room 1, North Office Building

Senator Folmer, Senator Wozniak, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the proposed 2009/10 fiscal year appropriation for the Pennsylvania Public Television Network.

We are all well aware of the worldwide turmoil that is driving the commonwealth's own financial crisis. We have already taken unprecedented measures to address this year's budget gap and there is no way to avoid the fact that deep cuts are also necessary for fiscal year 09-10. There are simply not enough revenues to sustain existing government operations. Painful choices must be made.

As is the process every year in Pennsylvania, the Governor has proposed his approach to spending state funds. The legislature is now in the process of evaluating, debating and negotiating what will appear in the final package.

For the purposes of today's conversation, we are talking about two separate appropriation issues. The first issue concerns approximately \$4.3 million in funding for the Pennsylvania Public Television Network, a state-administered agency that supports the commonwealth's public television stations. PPTN does not own a license, operate a station or produce programming. The second issue is roughly \$8 million in operating grants that flow to the commonwealth's eight public television stations.

Today's hearing is to identify the possible impacts of these cuts. I have been asked to explain how the Governor's Office of Administration, Office for Information Technology is prepared to mitigate effects of the proposed PPTN appropriation, specifically the \$2 million in remaining funding related to the agency and its assets. It is my understanding that following panels will speak to the affect of the elimination of station operating grants.

PPTN downloads, distributes and stores various programming. It has a digital library of approximately 25,000 archived programs that it matches with stations' schedules and delivers at designated times. The Governor's budget assumes that PPTN will discontinue its real-time, digital, fiber-optic delivery model. Rather, existing equipment will be moved to one of the commonwealth's computing facilities; stations will submit requests to dedicated PPTN staff who will burn archived programs to DVDs; DVDs will be express mailed to stations which will deliver programs from their own broadcast centers. The programming will continue to be available, just not through a real-time feed to the stations.

Simply cutting the fiber optic connection will save well over a half million dollars each year. Under this scenario, there's no need to maintain the staffing, infrastructure or network operations center necessary to manage the real-time, digital, fiber-optic system. Seven of PPTN's 18 employees will join the Office for Information Technology and will continue to provide archived programming to stations, among other things.

For all practical purposes, it appears that the most significant aspects of PPTN's services can be absorbed by moving key technological assets to already-existing computing facilities and retaining seven PPTN staff.

PPTN will have honored its federal and state grant obligations with regard to datacasting—a service that allows digital content that can be seen on a computer (text documents, web pages, images, audio, video) to be transmitted as part of a digital television signal. Going forward, stations will retain equipment provided by the grants, provided they maintain and account for it.

Finally, the Governor's Office of Administration is the commonwealth's designated lead agency with regard to interoperable communications in emergency situations and, as such, works closely with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency on a variety of communications issues. PPTN is identified in Pennsylvania's FCC-mandated Emergency Alert System Plan to provide Presidential announcements to public television affiliates as well as third-level back up for state and local emergency and Amber alerts. PPTN has been called upon to originate such alerts only twice since it was included in the plan—each of these nearly 5 years ago.

NPR, the Pennsylvania Cable Network (PA's "C-SPAN," a nonprofit organization), and the Pennsylvania State Police have agreed to take on PPTN's notification responsibilities. Moreover, these efforts will be supplemented by a real-time, digital technology alerting system currently being deployed by the Office for Information Technology. Updating the FCC-mandated plan is not administratively burdensome and the Office of Administration will work with PEMA to immediately update the plan, if appropriate.

The Office for Information Technology is currently in the process of inventorying and documenting PPTN's technological assets. As I have indicated, some will move to other commonwealth computing facilities and continue to provide services to public television stations. Other components will be either kept in "warm" status or properly stored for future use. We are also preparing a policy directive that will coordinate agency use of the equipment and develop a going-forward strategy for the assets that will build upon the PPTN strategic plan. The administration would like to work with you, our citizens, educators, technological experts and community and industry leaders to think through how we can fully use the assets to benefit the state and its citizens.

Despite the grim circumstances that bring us together today, there really are exceptional civic opportunities available through broadcast media. Technological innovation, consumer demand, federal broadband incentives and PPTN's warehoused equipment are only a few of the myriad factors to be considered.

I hope this information is helpful to you.