

Testimony of Julie S. Cleland before the
Senate Communications and Technology Committee
April 22, 2009

My name is Julie Cleland. I live in Kane, in McKean County, in Northwest Pennsylvania. I am a member of the Board of Representatives of WPSU TV, which is Penn State Public Broadcasting. I have served since 1995, and am a former chair of the board. I am a former Elementary School teacher and a community volunteer, having served 10 years on the Kane Area School Board and currently serving as Director of a local preschool.

I commit my time on WPSU's board to assuring that central Pennsylvanians receive quality TV programming that informs, inspires, and educates: programming that is not only safe for children, but increases their chances of success in school and society; programming that is produced for all ages, inviting engagement and conversation about issues of our day; programming that uncovers the lessons of history to give us a context within which to approach the current day; and, programming that inspires and entertains by lifting up before us the miracles of science, nature, and human creativity.

In the more rural areas of the state where there are few museums, art galleries, or science centers we can take virtual field trips every day because public broadcasting becomes our window to the world. WPSU serves 29 rural counties, one of the largest rural populations in the nation, and it provides a community resource that is unlike any other.

Much of our programming at WPSU is locally produced in response to the issues and stories that concern the rural population of central and north central Pennsylvania. Let me give you some examples:

Liquid Assets – a public media and outreach effort to inform the nation (it was syndicated nationally) of the critical role our water infrastructure plays in protecting our public health and promoting economic prosperity. The 90 minute documentary and community toolkit for facilitating local involvement explores the history, engineering, political, and economic challenges of our water infrastructure and encourages local discussions about public water and waste water issues.

Scholastic Scrimmage – This year, 90 central Pennsylvania high school teams competed to showcase their knowledge, recall, and reflexes in an on air quiz bowl show that showcases some of the brightest young people in Pennsylvania schools.

Common Ground Lobby Talks – Filmed in our WPSU studios and broadcast throughout the 29 county service area, this show brings together the academics, the community, and the power of public media to engage in public discourse. A live audience of community members listens, and talks with experts about issues that matter to Pennsylvanians:

Understanding Autism: Childhood to Adulthood
Universal Health Care in Action: A Thought Experiment
Marcellus Shale: The Environmental, Economic, and Social Issues
Meeting the Challenges of Alzheimers
Muslims in America
A Conversation with Salmon Rushdie
Where Girls Are – Gender Equity in Education

Our Town & Our Town/Kid's Cut – These shows feature the heritage and spirit of local communities as told by their citizens. Residents use their own video cameras to showcase the personalities and places that make their towns special. The Kid's Cut edition puts the editorial power in the hands of Middle School Students who suddenly, when asked "What is there to do here?", have something very positive to say about their town. In the process they have learned much needed computer literacy skills. Almost 50 communities have been highlighted since the show's debut in 1996.

The Grange Fair: An American Tradition – The main point of agricultural exchange for rural agricultural communities the Grange Fair in Centre County hosts an encampment of thousands of rural Pennsylvania families for a summertime week. WPSU captured these amazing phenomena in its 131st year as families prepared for months for a week at The Grange Fair.

Making of the Blue Band – This hour long documentary follows eight incoming freshman as they audition, and go through cuts and the grueling days of band camp while they pursue their dream to march with Penn State's famous band. For aspiring musicians and young people this is look at what it takes to follow and realize your dreams.

WW II – The War: Pennsylvanians shared stories – Audio and video clips of local residents sharing their stories in "The Lucky Ones." This production coincided with the national viewing of Ken Burns World War II series.

WPSU also serves our teachers, students, day care providers, parents, and preschoolers with many online educational resources. As one of 20 stations chosen nationally to participate in the PBS Raising Readers initiative, WPSU launched three new literacy focused research based PBS Kids series: Super Why, Word World, and Electric Company. These shows are supported by web-based resources and games designed to reach the 21st century learner reinforcing critical reading skills.

Other web based resources for preschoolers through 5th grade include Blue Ribbon Readers which provides interactive activities designed to improve word recognition and encourage reading comprehension. These programs are typical of local educational programming that is produced by a public broadcasting organization whose goal it is to serve the rural region it covers.

Last year, thousands of Pennsylvania teachers received additional training from public stations benefiting K-12 students. Every week, Pennsylvania's public stations offer hours of necessary Act 48 instructional credits for teachers. Through the Keystone Emedia source Pennsylvania teachers can access video clips, interactive flash animations, lesson plans - everything from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night to Humans Role in Climate Change to reading readiness themes— all tied to Pennsylvania and national standards, and other valuable resources within a matter of minutes. This vast library of educational objects increasingly enriches our preK-12 classrooms.

If the current budget cuts are maintained WPSU would lose nearly \$850,000 in state funds. These "station grants" monies not only directly support the locally produced educational programming and services, but also help to defray the costs of our national schedule including programs such as NOVA, Sesame Street, and The News Hour. Many of the locally produced educational programs such as Scholastic Scrimmage, the Our Town series, and others would surely have to be eliminated without the station grant funding.

In McKean County, much like in your own counties, we turn to public broadcasting to teach our children, and to provide them with a safe place to grow and develop; and, it is to public broadcasting that we turn to better understand the issues of our day and the complexities of our world. We turn to public broadcasting in good times and in times of crisis and emergency as demonstrated in the days after 9/11. I urge you to, at a minimum, please consider restoration of the \$7.95 million in station grants to retain this vital and valuable resource.

Thank-you for your consideration.