



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20554

Brendan Carr  
Chairman

January 29, 2025

Katherine Maher  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
National Public Radio

Paula A. Kerger  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
PBS

**RE: Federal License Obligations of NPR and PBS Member Stations**

Dear Ms. Maher and Ms. Kerger,

I am writing to inform you that I have asked the FCC's Enforcement Bureau to open an investigation regarding the airing of NPR and PBS programming across your broadcast member stations.

As you know, NPR and PBS distribute their programming through a network of approximately 1,500 NPR and PBS member broadcast stations. The relevant broadcast stations, which are licensed to operate by the FCC, are limited by the terms of their federal authorizations to operating as noncommercial educational broadcast stations—or NCEs.

Federal law prohibits any NCE station from running commercial advertisements. More specifically, Section 399B of the Communications Act prohibits an NCE station from airing commercials or other promotional announcements on behalf of for-profit entities. For-profit entities that contribute funds to NCE stations may receive on-air acknowledgements, but the FCC has long held that these underwriting announcements are for identification purposes only. These announcements should not promote the contributor's products, services, or businesses, and they may not contain comparative or qualitative descriptions, price information, calls to action, or inducements to buy, sell, rent, or lease.

I am concerned that NPR and PBS broadcasts could be violating federal law by airing commercials. In particular, it is possible that NPR and PBS member stations are broadcasting underwriting announcements that cross the line into prohibited commercial advertisements.

It is important to me, as Chairman of the FCC, that NCE broadcast stations stay true to their important missions and refrain from operating as noncommercial in name only. That is why, as noted above, I have asked the FCC's Enforcement Bureau, with assistance from the FCC's

Media Bureau, to initiate an investigation into the underwriting announcements and related policies of NPR, PBS, and their broadcast member stations.

For your awareness, I will be providing a copy of this letter to relevant Members of Congress because I believe this FCC investigation may prove relevant to an ongoing legislative debate. In particular, Congress is actively considering whether to stop requiring taxpayers to subsidize NPR and PBS programming. For my own part, I do not see a reason why Congress should continue sending taxpayer dollars to NPR and PBS given the changes in the media marketplace since the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

To the extent that these taxpayer dollars are being used to support a for profit endeavor or an entity that is airing commercial advertisements, then that would further undermine any case for continuing to fund NPR and PBS with taxpayer dollars.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B Carr", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brendan Carr