

# NEW JERSEY STATE AFL-CIO

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September 23, 2010

Dear Members of the Legislative Task Force on Public Broadcasting:

### Re: Privatization of NJN

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO has significant concerns regarding Governor Christie's plan to de-fund and privatize the New Jersey Public Broadcasting Authority (NJN Public Television). First, of course, are the jobs of the employees, who are members of the AFL-CIO, and second, is the importance of preserving a New Jersey based public affairs information source for the benefit of the state's residents.

The New Jersey State AFL-CIO has long standing concerns regarding privatization and its effect not only on workers, but on taxpayers. In short, New Jersey has been down the privatization road in the past, and it has been a troubling one, filled with no-bid contracts for the politically connected, an increase in costs to taxpayers, a lack of accountability to government agencies and squandering of resources. When it comes to privatization, the private sector is not a panacea, it is not a cure-all.

For this reason, we thank the Task Force for engaging in a deliberative and in-depth analysis of NJN, and respectfully ask to please not focus simply on "bottom line" costs by transitioning away from government via privatization. Furthermore, the time frame for this transition that has been selected by the Governor is unrealistic in regard to allowing for the analysis required to make an informed decision.

Therefore, we thank you for holding these hearings and we ask you to please delve deep into the issues of privatization as it would apply to NJN. Will a privatized NJN sacrifice valuable assets such as broadcast licenses? Over time, will the transition to a privatized NJN forfeit revenue due to these sales, rather than save taxpayers money? And of course, what about the employees of NJN? Will privatized jobs be similar in pay and benefits that the current employees have? Will these employees lose their union? Will they lose their bargaining rights?

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Let's be frank - often when services are privatized, they are done in a way as to transition to a union-free employer. They also reduce wages and benefits for workers and remove workplace protections. Often, the first categories vendors that pursue privatized contracts examine are labor costs – the basic question being, “how can we pay people less to do the same exact job?” These labor “savings” are then espoused as “efficiencies.” It's the classic race to the bottom for workers that the New Jersey State AFL-CIO has been fighting for decades. The bottom line when it comes to workers facing privatization is one thing – lower pay, less job security and reduced benefits.

NJN is a strong union employer, employing approximately 130 members of the IFPTE and CWA, both AFL-CIO affiliates. The welfare of these workers is a priority for us, and we respectfully ask for it to be a priority for you as well.

In addition to the concerns of the employees at NJN, the New Jersey State AFL-CIO strongly believes in the mission of NJN, and feels that mission would be compromised if privatization occurs or if state support is ended. Such a transition would result in New Jersey becoming one of the few states in the nation to not support a public television station. We are all familiar with the New York City & Philadelphia news stations that dominate New Jersey broadcasting, often squeezing the oxygen out of New Jersey based public affairs reporting. Privatizing NJN would eliminate the state's best reporting of New Jersey public affairs and would result in a media void for the state. With a consolidation occurring in the newspaper industry, it's more important than ever that New Jersey have an independent, Jersey focused television station.

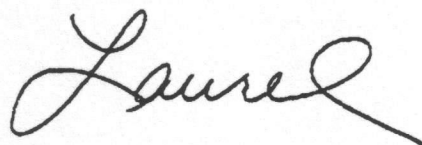
NJN has focused on building a state awareness within New Jersey, providing news, public affairs, and cultural programming that informs and educates viewers. This would certainly be compromised if state funding was removed.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to prioritize what's most important about NJN – its core mission of New Jersey focused reporting, and to also stand up for the welfare of its employees.

Sincerely,



Charles Wowkanech  
President



Laurel Brennan  
Secretary-Treasurer