



The following is an open letter to the Montclair State University College of Communication and Media regarding their agreement to manage NJ PBS beginning July 1, 2026. It is addressed to Dr. Keith Strudler, the dean of the college.

Keith Strudler

Dean of the College of Communication and Media, College of Communication and Media,
Academic Affairs
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave.
Montclair, NJ 07043

Dear Dr. Strudler,

One of the top concerns for the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists is to ensure that our family, friends and neighbors in the Garden State are receiving the news and information that they need to know what is happening in their towns.

We are aware of the concerns raised by some regarding Montclair State University taking over the management of the state's public television network.

While it is not our place to endorse a particular entity, we would like to offer a perspective as well as our expectations, which is the same regardless of who is practicing journalism in New Jersey.

First and foremost, a state-controlled network is nothing new as it was done in New Jersey for three decades before then-Gov. Chris Christie decided to end funding for public media in 2011. States that continue to operate with government funding includes Georgia, Maryland, Oregon and South Carolina.

It is also not uncommon that other state networks are operated through a university. This includes Wisconsin and North Carolina. There are also other universities that operate as

standalone operations, sometimes paired with a public radio station, such as The Ohio State University and the University of Houston.

At the same time, there have been instances where there has been political or institutional influence on public media operations, whether through a university or a state agency.

Critics have cited reports about the University of Illinois requiring reporters at its NPR station to pass along accusations of sexual misconduct to administrators, and questions raised about how then-Arizona gubernatorial candidate Katie Hobbs was granted an interview with Arizona PBS, which is owned by Arizona State University. We also note one of the more infamous cases of political interference in recent years involving West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

Though we are offering our observations as Montclair State University's College of Communication and Media is poised to take over New Jersey's public television network on Wednesday, July 1, the above instances are prompting us to make the following recommendations:

1. Editorial independence – As detailed, concerns of potential political and institutional influence of a university-operated network are real. Therefore, we insist on a strong editorial firewall between the newsroom, station managers and university administration to ensure transparency and the trust of the audience for the new network.

2. Adherence to SPJ's code of ethics – Our national organization's code of ethics has been the moral compass of our industry for decades. We believe that any newsroom, let alone individual journalists, is ensuring high standards in their work by adhering to these principles. We would also refer the new operators to "Editorial Integrity for Public Media," which has a plethora of resources that can be used.

3. Remember all 21 counties – New Jersey is unique in that it is a state that is heavily reliant on two major markets that are also three-state regions, where two companies own most of the newspaper banners in the state. This has created a unique news desert where information is distributed by spirited hyperlocal digital websites, a regional cable news network that is seen in about two-thirds of the state, several New Jersey-based radio stations, and – ironically – the state's public television network currently operated by The WNET Group. We would be doing an injustice if we did not advocate for all 21 counties to receive attention from the new network.

These observations and recommendations are being offered in the spirit of wanting to see communities in our state covered with more regularity. We believe this can be done by the new operators of the state's public television network, as its predecessors have done in the past.

We wish Montclair State University the best of luck as it prepares to be the home of public television in the Garden State once again.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors of the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists