September 12, 2022

Kelu Chao
Acting Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Agency for Global Media
330 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20237

Sylvia Rosabal
Director
Office of Cuba Broadcasting
4201 NW 77th Ave
Miami, FL 33166

Dear Acting CEO Chao and Director Rosabal:

We write to urge you to re-examine the measures to "reorganize" the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) that the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) announced earlier this year. We believe that USAGM has failed to justify to Congress as to how these changes will further OCB's mission to support the right of the Cuban people to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas. In light of last year's unprecedented and historic protests across Cuba, and within all applicable rules and regulations, we request that you reconsider any plans to implement this reduction in force (RIF).

In the wake of the historic July 11, 2021 protests, while the Cuban regime's media and internet blackouts stifled access to information across the island, we believe that firing many of OCB's experienced personnel should not be the next course of action. In terms of funding, Congress has yet to receive an adequate explanation as to why USAGM has repeatedly requested drastic cuts of more than 50% to OCB starting in FY2019, and why it continues to do so despite requesting static funding or increases to the rest of its entities. The request for a more than 50% reduction to OCB originated from within USAGM, whose management would have known how devastating these cuts would be. Furthermore, we understand that many of the employees included on a preliminary RIF list are international broadcasters, television technicians/video editors and other employees whose skills are necessary to support USAGM's wider effort to produce more digital content.

Despite multiple requests, we have yet to receive clarity on whether the RIF at OCB was initiated pursuant to budgetary constraints, or pursuant to "reorganization." We were briefed that on August 16, 2022, the American Federation of Government Employees was informed that the RIF was pursuant to OCB's "budget constraints." However, Congress provided transfer authorities for FY2021 and FY2022 to avoid a RIF. Even though Congress has not yet passed a FY2023 funding bill, Congress still retains the prerogative to provide transfer authorities to OCB for FY2023. For USAGM to base such drastic actions on assumed budget levels, prior to Congressional action, is premature.

We are also alarmed by the inclusion of several employees on a preliminary RIF list, particularly in light of the illegal process that occurred during the 2009 RIF at OCB. For example, we understand that six employees currently listed were also on the 2009 RIF list. These employees were reinstated after a court found that the RIF was implemented illegally.

Additionally, we are told that two veterans, including one that is a ten (10) point veteran, are also included on the preliminary RIF list. In sum, we are profoundly concerned by the RIF that USAGM plans to implement at OCB, which will result in up to 30 federal employees being laid off in November 2022, just before the holidays.

As we continue to exercise our oversight and appropriating duties, we respectfully request a thorough justification of USAGM's decision to implement a RIF at OCB. We also request an answer as to why USAGM requested a more than 50% reduction to OCB's funding in the first place.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and we look forward to your prompt reply on this time sensitive matter.

Sincerely,

Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Rick Scott
U.S. Senator

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress

Carlos Gimenez
Member of Congress

Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress