



THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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July 22, 2020

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer,

I would like to thank you for your support of the essential role of news organizations in our national response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and ask that you continue and build on that support in the next round of relief legislation. The spread of the coronavirus has been a generational challenge for our nation, and now more than ever, Americans need more and better information to combat the disease and hold our leaders accountable for the response by the federal government, their states and their communities.

As president of the largest union representing journalists in the United States, I am writing to call on you to continue pushing for assistance that will keep my members—reporters, photographers, producers and editors in cities from New York, to Louisville, to Casper, Wyoming—on the job and on watch for the communities they serve.

The news industry is facing an extinction-level event at a critical moment for our country, when we need to be informed about an unprecedented public health and economic crisis. Nearly 500 news organizations have already availed themselves of a financial lifeline in the form of federal loans from the Paycheck Protection Program. A bi-partisan bill sponsored by you and your colleagues would extend that aid to newsrooms owned by large media chains. We support The Local News and Emergency Information Act of 2020, S. 3718.

The unprecedented downturn facing the news business created by the pandemic poses an existential crisis for an already struggling industry. The news business has battled these last two decades to stay afloat, and few states have seen the damage of a changing business model more than New York, which has lost 40% of its newspapers—nearly 200 titles—since 2004. Nationally, 2,100 fewer newspapers have been shuttered or merged amid a wave of closures and consolidations, and the sudden drop in advertising revenue that followed the pandemic has already led to the closure of 50 newspapers since March.

Surviving newsrooms, already cut to the bone, have implemented layoffs, furloughs and cut days when they print and deliver the paper, including many of the largest chains. Gannett, the largest chain owner,

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has mandated monthly furloughs that, on any given day, leave 25% of their journalists home, unpaid and unable to work in some 261 American cities. We at The NewsGuild are deeply grateful for your persistent efforts to hold Alden Capital and other hedge funds [accountable for gutting newsrooms](#) across the U.S.

That is why it is essential that aid for the news industry must be targeted at news jobs. Americans depend on reliable, factual information from their local news outlets every day, to find out basic but life-saving information tracking the spread of COVID-19, the changing precautions mandated by public health officials, and the effectiveness of those measures. In every state, we need every journalist available on the street, gathering that information, checking the public statements of officials against hard data and expert knowledge and creating a factual report for the public. That is why aid for the industry must be linked to sustaining these essential workers' jobs. Aid that can be applied to the bottom line of news corporations as they choose without finding its way to individual, local newsrooms is not sustaining a public service. It would be a bailout for massive corporations.

The essential role of a free and vibrant press has been an acknowledged feature of American democracy enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution. Unfortunately, the current crisis could deeply undermine the functioning of that free and vibrant press unless urgent action is taken to protect local news reporting.

Within weeks, people in every city and town in America will be party to decisions about when and whether their children return to school, when and what businesses will reopen. Not long after, they will cast votes to decide who will serve in public offices from the White House to their local assessor. We need every journalist digging hard to find the information every American needs to inform those crucial choices.

Amid a chorus of voices you are likely hearing during these hard times for our country, I ask you to renew your support for the measures in the Local News and Emergency Information Act of 2020 and ensure that they are included in the next recovery package the Senate hopes to pass in the coming days. This specific, targeted and temporary assistance can save jobs, save lives and save our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Schleuss', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Schleuss
President
The NewsGuild