

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Leahy,

We write to ask that any future coronavirus stimulus package contain funding to support local journalism and media¹. Without this support, communities across the country risk losing one of their key sources of accurate information about what citizens need to know and do in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local news is in a state of crisis that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For over a decade, there has been a steady succession of local outlets closing down, reporters being laid off, production schedules cut, and resources tightened as the growth of social media and technology platforms has concentrated critical advertising revenue in the hands of a few. But the current public health crisis has made this problem worse. As many communities have shut down local restaurants, entertainment venues, and other non-essential businesses in an attempt to “flatten the curve,” local papers and local broadcasters have lost even more of the advertising revenue they rely on from these businesses. Communities across the country have seen the further decimation of this important industry as local publications have stopped printing and laid off staff in the last few weeks.

¹ While there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes “local journalism” or “local media,” a PEN America report on the challenges facing this market defines “local news” as “media outlets (TV, radio, newspapers, and digital sites) dedicated to covering newsworthy information that is relevant to communities within a specific geographic region/connected by a particular place (rural, town, city, and state-level).” The report also adds that “[w]ithin a local news ecosystem, different outlets may tailor their coverage to different constituencies in the community—such as a particular ethnic or language group or a particular neighborhood.” *Losing the News: the Decimation of Local News and the Search for Solutions*, PEN America, available at <https://pen.org/local-news/>.

Local news plays an indispensable role in American civic life as a trusted source for critical information, a watchdog for government and corporate accountability, and a building block of social cohesion. Thousands of communities across the country turn to local news for information on governance, elections, education, health, and numerous issues specific to their cities, towns, and neighborhoods. Local news sources tailored to a particular ethnic or language group, or a particular neighborhood, also play a critical role in covering a wide range of issues that impact underrepresented communities.

The current public health crisis has made the already vital role of local news even more critical. The World Health Organization has identified the existence of a “massive infodemic” about COVID-19, that is, “an overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.” Some of the most important guidance for families and businesses during this crisis has been highly localized. Local journalism has been providing communities answers to critical questions, including information on where to get locally tested, hospital capacity, road closures, essential business hours of operation, and shelter-in-place orders. During this unprecedented public health crisis, people need to have access to their trusted local news outlets for this reliable and sometimes life-saving information.

Reliable local news and information has been critically important during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet it has become more scarce. Any future stimulus package must contain funding to support this important industry at such a critical time. Such a provision should be tailored to benefit aid recipients who make a long-term commitment to high quality local news.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senate



SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senate



JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senate

TIM KAINÉ

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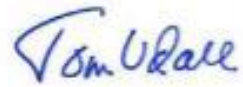
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