



Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader

Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our concern over the disappearance of local news and information in communities around the country — an [ongoing decline](#) that the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis [have accelerated](#). As you consider further economic stimulus legislation to help the country at this precarious moment, we urge you to include targeted assistance to local journalism, just as you have with other industries deemed essential to our nation’s health, prosperity and recovery.

Local news outlets, ranging from state- to city- and community-level media organizations, are necessary partners in meeting the critical information needs of people in the United States — especially during today’s public health and economic crises. In fact, many state and local governments have now recognized, in executive orders relating to shutdowns, that local journalism is an “[essential service](#).”

Community-specific news has never been more important to ensuring people’s well-being, yet many outlets will not survive COVID-19 without immediate economic help. Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, local news outlets have been providing indispensable, real-time updates on information imperative to safeguarding America’s communities. Fact-based reporting on local “shelter-in-place” orders, business closures, testing sites, school policies, government aid and health services are just a few of the areas in which national media coverage cannot replace community reporting. For example, some local outlets have shifted coverage to [fill the language gap](#) on COVID-19 information after being flooded with questions indicating that information on the pandemic was not being effectively communicated to immigrant communities.

In recognition of the need to keep the public informed, many local outlets have dropped their paywalls for COVID-19-related coverage, even at the expense of much-needed revenue. However, COVID-19’s devastating economic impact on local news outlets is threatening their ability to function at all. Over the past two weeks, in the face of plummeting ad revenue, dozens of local publications — from the [largest chains](#) to [successful nonprofit](#) and [community outlets](#) to tribal media¹ and [family-owned](#) newspapers — have furloughed or laid off their reporters, [reduced their publication frequency](#), or dropped their print editions altogether. In an industry that employs more than 80,000 people nationwide, many outlets are now struggling to cover even half of their reporters’ salaries, with newsroom layoffs increasing across the country.

¹ According to preliminary results from a survey being conducted by the Native American Journalists Association, about 43 percent of tribal media are facing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, with around 29 percent facing furloughs or layoffs.

These cuts significantly impact communities' ability to receive critical news and information. Local news outlets that serve people of color, low-income households and other marginalized groups that are [disproportionately impacted](#) by COVID-19 and its economic fallout may not have sufficient resources to provide robust news and information on the pandemic. For example, rampant misinformation about Black people's immunity from COVID-19 may have directly contributed to a climbing death rate — so far, 70 percent of people who have died in Chicago and Louisiana are Black, that number is 81 percent in Milwaukee. Without adequate resources, local news outlets cannot meet communities' information needs, putting public safety, the economy, and, ultimately, our democracy at risk.

The financial crisis facing news outlets today adds to the devastation of a decade-long decline in local news. In the past 15 years, due to consolidations and a collapsing business model, [one in four local newspapers across the United States has closed](#) — a trend that has left many Americans struggling to find trustworthy news and particularly vulnerable to disinformation.

As we face what the World Health Organization has described as an “infodemic,” Americans cannot endure an accelerated decline in access to vital information. And like other adversely affected sectors of the economy, local news cannot withstand the hardships of COVID-19 and the worsening economic crisis without federal support. While local news outlets can compete with all other small businesses for a loan through the CARES Act, none of those funds were specifically set aside in recognition of the “essential service” provided by local journalism, nor are those funds enough to meet the need. We're calling on you to specifically include the journalism sector in the congressional assistance packages revitalizing affected industries and sustaining workers across our nation.

To ensure that communities across the country can find the news and information they need to navigate the public health and economic crises, we ask you to commit at least \$5 billion to support local journalism in the next stimulus package. This should include:

- Increased federal appropriations to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to support public and community media of all kinds
- Emergency funds targeted at preserving newsrooms and reporting jobs at local commercial and nonprofit news outlets
- Investments to address the civic-information needs of communities most impacted by the long-term decline of local news and the spread of news deserts — including communities of color, immigrant communities, Indigenous communities, rural communities, and working-class communities
- Increased federal spending on public health and other government advertising, prioritizing local and community media
- Safeguards to ensure that public funding does not impinge on the editorial independence of any news organization

We are grateful for your attention to this matter and stand ready to provide additional information and guidance.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Nossel, PEN America

Craig Aaron, Free Press Action
Michael Copps, Common Cause and former FCC commissioner

Alliance for Community Media
American Economic Liberties Project
American Journalism Project
American Society of Journalists and Authors
Arrandale Ventures
Article 19
Association of Alternative Newsmedia
Boston University Department of Journalism
Carol Schwalbe, Director, School of Journalism, University of Arizona
Center for Democracy & Technology
Center for Digital Democracy
Color Of Change
Colorado Media Project
Democracy Fund Voice
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Ellen P. Goodman, Professor, Rutgers Law School
Fight for the Future
Freedom of the Press Foundation
Generation Justice
Indivisible
International Women's Media Foundation
La Noticia
LION Publishers
Lucas Graves, Associate Professor, School of Journalism & Mass Communication, UW–Madison
Marianne DiChristina, Dean, Boston University College of Communication
Martin Hilbert, Professor, Department of Communication, University of California Davis
Media Alliance
Media Mobilizing Project
Media, Inequality & Change (MIC) Center
MediaJustice
National Association of Hispanic Journalists
National Association of Hispanic Publications
National Federation of Community Broadcasters
National Writers Union
Native American Journalists Association
NewsGuild-CWA
Nicholas Lemann, Professor and Dean Emeritus, Columbia Journalism School
Protect Democracy
Public Citizen
Public Knowledge
Radio Bilingue
Reporters Without Borders USA
Save Journalism Project
Society For News Design
Ted Conover, Director, New York University Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute