

May 22, 2026

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate of Maryland
H-107 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson,

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I hereby veto Senate Bill 459 – *Procurement – Advertising – Maryland News Organizations (Local News for Maryland Communities Act of 2026)*.

Senate Bill 459 aims to support Maryland's local journalism ecosystem by requiring that at least 50% of a procurement unit's total dollar value of contracts for advertising be directed to Maryland news organizations, with the exception of advertising whose primary audience is outside the State and for the purpose of promoting Maryland tourism or supporting employee recruitment or economic investment.

I commend the Maryland General Assembly, and Senator Rosapepe and Delegate Foley in particular, for their sustained commitment to supporting Maryland's local journalism. Local news organizations provide a diversity of thought and perspective essential to an informed citizenry, and their role as an independent check on government and private conduct, through both routine and investigative reporting, is a public good that my Administration values. It is precisely because my Administration shares the goal of a healthy and sustainable local news ecosystem that I have given this legislation careful and serious consideration. However, after that consideration, I have determined that Senate Bill 459, as written, would significantly impair the state's ability to communicate effectively with Maryland residents.

The State and its agencies have a fundamental obligation to deliver critical information to Marylanders through the most effective and efficient means available. Meeting that obligation requires access to a full range of modern advertising channels, including digital platforms, streaming services, outdoor media, and partnerships with major regional organizations, which allow the State to reach a broad and diverse audience where they receive their information. By mandating that half of all advertising contract dollars be directed to Maryland news organizations, Senate Bill 459 severely restricts the state's ability to utilize these effective channels.

This concern is compounded by the prevalence of subscription paywalls among local news organizations that are increasingly reliant on the electronic delivery of news as the availability of print media declines. A mandate directing State advertising funds to outlets whose contents are accessible only to paying subscribers does not serve the

State's interest in reaching the broadest possible audience. Marylanders who do not subscribe to a given outlet will not see the State's message regardless of how much the State spends to place it there. Effective public communication requires that the State's advertising investment generate a measurable return in reach, engagement, and delivery to the communities that need it most. In addition, a news outlet's identity should be anchored by its geography. When a publication is owned by a multi-state or national media conglomerate, its editorial priorities, staffing and financial decisions may reflect goals that are far from the communities they serve. State resources intended to support local journalism should be directed towards outlets rooted in and accountable to Maryland communities, not multi-state ownership structures.

The legislation also creates financial risk for the State. Mandating a significant share of advertising funds to organizations without regard to their proven standards of accuracy, accountability, and return on investment exposes the State to the expenditure of public dollars in ways that cannot be adequately justified to Maryland taxpayers. The State's advertising contracts must be governed by the same principles of performance and accountability that apply across all areas of state procurement.

The fiscal consequence of this mandate is clear. If enacted, Senate Bill 459 would force the State into an untenable choice: increase its overall advertising budget to maintain current levels of reach and effectiveness or reduce its advertising reach to remain within existing budget constraints. It is my assessment that neither outcome serves the public interest. The first places an unnecessary and unbudgeted burden on State resources. The second diminishes the state's ability to communicate with Marylanders.

My Administration looks forward to working with the General Assembly, sponsors of the legislation, and all relevant stakeholders to pursue executive actions or potential legislation in the 2027 session that supports local journalism in a manner that is feasible, fiscally sound, and consistent with the State's obligations to all Marylanders it serves. This includes a particular focus on local news outlets that inform and empower underserved communities, those who are most often affected by the loss of reliable community-based reporting. Ensuring these voices are heard and these communities are served remains a core priority in any framework that we develop.

For these reasons provided in this letter, I have vetoed Senate Bill 459.

Sincerely,

Wes Moore
Governor