



THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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February 14, 2023

Honorable Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Honorable Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Ways & Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegates Atterbeary and Wilkins,

I'm the president of The NewsGuild-Communications Workers of America, the largest union of journalists and media workers in North America. We represent workers at the *Baltimore Sun*, *The Capital/Capital Gazette*, the *Carroll County Times*, all part of the Baltimore Sun Media Group, and staff at the *Washington Post*.

I write to you in support of House Bill 540, which would support small businesses advertising in Maryland local media.

We are one of the fastest growing unions on the continent because media workers, and particularly journalists, have seen a massive tightening of the job market in newsrooms across the U.S. In the last five years 6,500 workers from more than 100 news organizations have unionized with us.

In December 2018 about 50 workers at *The Capital* unionized with us, following a shooting when a gunman killed five employees in its Annapolis newsroom five months earlier. The workers received a Pulitzer Prize honoring their journalism through their unthinkable tragedy. When they unionized, they wrote:

“Local journalism is unique. We are your neighbors, the eyes and ears of your communities. We report on what matters most to you every day: the crime down the block, the local football team, your child’s school. Whether the sun shines or disaster strikes, we are right there with you. As local news outlets dwindle, we know now more than ever that quality community news is a gift too precious to lose.”¹

¹ Chesapeake News Guild, [Because no community is too small.](#)

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When we lose local journalists, we lose the voice and soul of a community. Maryland residents depend on local news to know what's happening in their towns, at their school boards, at local businesses and at their state capital.

Last year the number of reporters covering state capitols full-time shrank by 34% since 2014, to just 245 nationwide in 2022.² Between 2008 and 2020 overall newsroom employment fell by 26% in the U.S., a staggering blow to our democracy. Our democracy, especially at the local level, is informed and powered by a free and fully-funded press.

New organizations, like the *Baltimore Banner*, a digital-native news outlet that launched last year, are inspiring. We must do everything we can to incentivize the creation and expansion of such local reporting across Maryland.

Some 2,500 daily and weekly newspapers have closed since 2005 in the U.S., and there are fewer than 6,500 left across the country. Last summer newspapers were closing at a rate of two every week.³

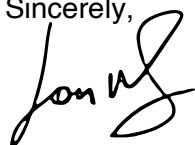
In Maryland, 10 counties have just one newspaper left operating. According to an authoritative study of the news industry, between 2004 and 2019, Maryland lost 52% of its newspapers (dailies and weeklies) and 63% of their circulation.⁴

We need action to preserve and strengthen the Fourth Estate. House Bill 540 is an important first step, for it will offer an incentive for local businesses to advertise in local media, thereby providing much-needed revenue for Maryland newsrooms. Such legislation will support the growth of Maryland's small businesses.

We thank Delegates Vogel, Foley, Fair, Grossman, D. Jones, Lehman and Wells for sponsoring this important legislation to save local news.

I urge you to prioritize and pass House Bill 540 and stand with Maryland's journalists and media workers. It has the backing of America's journalists and our union.

Sincerely,



Jon Schleuss
President
The NewsGuild-CWA

² Pew Research Center, [The number of full-time statehouse reporters at U.S. newspapers has declined 34% since 2014](#)

³ Washington Post, [Every week, two more newspapers close — and 'news deserts' grow larger](#)

⁴ Penelope Muse Abernathy, "The Expanding News Desert," 2020: <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>.
See the page on Maryland: <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/states/maryland/>