



THE NEWSGUILD

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January 20, 2025

Chair Delegate Luke Clippinger
Vice Chair Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett
Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Delegate Clippinger and Vice Chair Delegate Bartlett,

I'm Jon Schleuss, president of The NewsGuild-CWA. We represent thousands of America's journalists throughout the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. I write in support of HB 74, which would expand the market for placement of legal and public notices required by Maryland Law.

The required publication of legal notices and public announcements about local and county government functions is a long-standing and necessary practice throughout the United States. The publication of these notices provides critical transparency so that residents can read unbiased information about how our government functions.

Many residents read these notices in printed newspapers, which were also archived by local libraries.

However, with the onset of the internet, many readers have shifted from print publications to digital news sources and printed notices are not the most cost-effective or most-accessible vehicle for these notices.

HB 74 would allow local governments to place these notices in either print or digital publications, providing maximum exposure for government notices and potentially reduce costs on local governments.

There have been recent efforts for the government itself to publish these notices, both here in Maryland and around the country. However, these efforts reduce support of local media and rely on the government to self-report. Government self-reporting does not support the transparency our fore fathers envisioned when they enshrined a free press into the U.S. Constitution. A healthy democracy depends on independent, fact-based journalism.

Diane Mastrull
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Jon Schleuss
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Further, the placement of legal and public notices help a fledgling local media ecosystem, which has been near a collapse in recent years.

The U.S. has lost more than a third of the newspapers that existed in 2005, according to a 2023 study by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. We lost 130 newspapers in 2023 alone. Newspapers in small and medium-sized markets have seen profit margins of 20 percent or more fall to single digits, flatline or go negative.

And 43,000 newspaper journalists—almost two thirds—have lost their jobs since 2005, the vast majority of them in local communities and cities.

The Northwestern study notes that while social media and other digital platforms have led to the formation of new online communities, geographically defined communities remain the critical common denominator for effective local governance, strong electoral ties and civic engagement.

It's therefore critical that we continue to support local news outlets that serve our communities and rethink how we can sustain these outlets to stay in business.

Expanding the number of options for legal and public notice placements to digital media is a good step that recognizes the changing media landscape, while continuing to support Maryland businesses that support Marylanders.

I urge the committee to support HB 74.

Sincerely,

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

Jon Schleuss

President

The NewsGuild-CWA