



UNF: House Bill 43

02/06/2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Wells,

On behalf of Baltimore Public Media, the proud producer of Maryland's National Public Radio member station WYPR, I am writing in opposition to House Bill 43, the *Local Newspapers for Maryland Communities Act of 2026*. We appreciate Delegate Foley's intent to strengthen local journalism and share the goal of ensuring that public dollars support trusted, community-based news organizations across Maryland.

As drafted, however, HB 43 raises significant concerns for local public media by limiting its procurement requirements to print and digital advertising while excluding on-air and broadcast platforms. This exclusion risks unintended consequences for locally operated public radio and public television stations that provide essential local journalism and rely on public advertising as a meaningful source of revenue.

While we continue to grow our digital platforms, broadcast remains the primary way Marylanders access our journalism and the primary source of our advertising support. Digital advertising represented approximately 7% of our total advertising revenue in FY24, 11% in FY25, and we are currently tracking to roughly 14% in FY26. The majority of our sustainability continues to come from on-air underwriting and broadcast sponsorships.

In practice, state agencies navigating complex procurement systems often follow the most straightforward path to compliance. Without a clear understanding of how advertising budgets are currently allocated across print, digital, and broadcast media, there is a meaningful risk that HB 43's print and digital minimums could inadvertently divert funding away from broadcast outlets. Marylanders access our journalism freely with no charge whether digitally or on-air, making advertising an especially critical source of revenue.

These concerns are heightened by the recent rescission of federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which has placed significant strain on small and mid-sized stations statewide. Additional diversion of government advertising dollars away from broadcast media could compound these challenges at a particularly vulnerable moment for local public media. At the same time, we are experiencing instability among longtime private, educational, and



healthcare advertisers as broader federal funding and employment disruptions ripple through Maryland's economy.

We hope this feedback is received in the constructive spirit in which it is offered. At a time when both newspapers and public media are facing significant financial pressure, we believe the underlying intent of HB 43 could be broadened to strengthen Maryland's full local journalism ecosystem—including public radio and public television—rather than inadvertently disadvantaging one form of local media over another.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to Maryland's civic infrastructure. We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective and remain eager to engage constructively in the ways Maryland state government can help foster an environment in which local journalism thrives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'David Belew' with a long, sweeping underline.

David Belew
Director of Development
Baltimore Public Media