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Imagine a future without local news

New York must enact Local Journalism Sustainability Act

Submitted by the Empire State Local News Coalition

As objective and independent news writers and editors, we have an imperative to cover the issues most important to the people of Niagara County and Grand Island. Every day, our team is on the ground questioning elected officials, uplifting the stories of community changemakers, and uncovering truths that some would rather keep hidden. But, amidst industry challenges, it is no longer unfathomable to picture a future when New York state is completely without local newspapers and other local news outlets.

According to the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, two-and-a-half newspapers now close each week in the U.S. More than 3,000 newspapers have shuttered across the country since 2004, and New York has been particularly hard hit. In 2004, New York boasted 501 newspapers; today, it's only 260. In 2022 alone, 30 newspapers closed across the state. A quarter of New York's counties are news deserts - down to their last newspaper. Orleans County recently became the first in the state to have none. These closures have also resulted in thousands of lost journalism and newsroom-supporting jobs.

Local news matters. Studies show that, when a community loses its source of local news, it experiences decreased voter turnout and civic engagement; increased municipal borrowing costs that lead to higher taxes; and decreased transparency among government and business officials, leading to increased waste, fraud and abuse. As newspapers shutter, communities become more polarized, leaving us stuck in a never-ending doom loop where we lose sight of our shared values. During this era



Support the New York Local Journalism Sustainability Act

- Contact Gov. Kathy Hochul at 518-474-8390 or https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form.
•Contact Sen. Rob Ortt at Ortt@nysenate.gov or 716-434-0680 or 518-455-2024.
•Contact Sen. Sean Ryan at ryan@nysenate.gov or 716-854-8705 or 518-455-3240.
•Contact Assemblyman Angelo Morinello at morinelloa@nyassembly.gov or 716-282-6062 or 518-455-5284.
Our newspaper is a proud member of the Empire State Local News Coalition. Support the coalition at SaveNYLocalNews.com.

of intense national partisanship, local news offers a path forward.

The time to act is now. That is why Niagara Frontier Publications has joined with over 150 other New York local newspapers to launch the Empire State Local News Coalition.

The Empire State Local News Coalition, comprising both print and online local newspapers, is advocating for sound public policy that ensures the important work of local news organizations can continue in our state. Through our independent journalism, we aim to serve, inform, uplift and protect New Yorkers. Our coalition cares deeply about our local communities as well as the future of New York's free press. However, market forces



are making it nearly impossible for us to survive. So, together, we are sounding the alarm bell for our leaders in Albany to hear.

At the heart of our advocacy is the Local Journalism Sustainability Act. Sponsored by New York State Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal and Assembly member Carrie

Woerner, with the bipartisan support of 55 co-sponsors, this bill provides tax credits to local news outlets for the employment of local news journalists. News organizations are incentivized to actually add jobs, returning reporters to many of the state's newsrooms, which are becoming increasingly desolate. Importantly, the bill is also content neutral, meaning that any legitimate local news outlet - left, right, or in between - can benefit from this bill. The objectivity of the bill's eligibility requirements means the legislation cannot be weaponized to penalize news organizations critical of government officials.

As New York loses talented journalists, lawmakers must act to ensure the industry is allowed not only to survive but also to thrive. Only local news outlets - with boots-on-the-ground journalists - can deliver the hyperlocal updates and investigations necessary to sustain a community's civic and financial well-being. Imagine no stories about the village board meeting or the school budget debate. No pictures of your granddaughter's first soccer goal. No obituary of your friendly (and eccentric) neighbor. No investigative reporting to hold public officials to account. And no trusted institution to convene the community around a family in need.

We need your help to save local news in New York. To get the Local Journalism Sustainability Act across the finish line, lawmakers need to hear from you about why our newspaper matters and why this bill is important to you. If you would like to help, reach out to Gov. Hochul and your local representatives to let them know you stand with local news.

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