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Empire State Local News Coalition celebrates inclusion of \$90 million local media tax credit in FY25 NYS budget

First-in-the-nation bill incentivizes retention & hiring of local journalists

Submitted by the Empire State Local News Coalition

Gov. Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature recently unveiled the final state budget, including a payroll tax credit for local news outlets, modeled on the Local Journalism Sustainability Act, in the sweeping package. With the passage of this bill, New York is now the first state in the nation to incentivize hiring and retaining local journalists.

This game-changer for the local news industry comes just months after the launch of the Empire State Local News Coalition, an unprecedented, grassroots campaign powered by more than 200 community newspapers across the state.

New York State Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, the Senate bill sponsor, said, "I'm elated that our first-in-the-nation Local Journalism Sustainability Act is passing in the state budget. A thriving local news industry is vital to the health of our democracy, and it's our responsibility to help ensure New Yorkers have access to independent and community-focused journalism. Thank you to Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Gov. Hochul, our Assembly sponsor Woerner, and the over 200 local publications of the Empire State Local News Coalition who helped pass our bill. Our efforts will help ensure that our democracy will not die in darkness."

The program – \$30 million per year for three years – allows each eligible newspaper and broadcast business to receive a 50% refundable tax credit against the first \$50,000 of an employee's salary, up to a total of \$300,000 per business. \$4 million will be allocated to incentivize print and broadcast businesses to hire new journalists. The remaining \$26 million will be split evenly between businesses with fewer than 100 employees and those with more than 100 employees, ensuring that hyperlocal, independent news organizations have a fair shot at access to these funds.

After stalling for years, the Local Journalism Sustainability Act catapulted into a top legislative priority this session following the early-2024 founding of the Empire State Local News Coalition, and the coalition's mobilization of support from hundreds of New York hometown papers, as well as a broad range of stakeholders from around the country, including the Rebuild Local News Coalition, Microsoft, and El Diario. Organized labor including NYS AFL-CIO, CWA District 1, and national and local news guilds also played a critical role in mobilizing support for this historic bill.

"The Empire State Local News Coalition is thrilled by the state budget's inclusion of a payroll tax credit for local news outlets modeled on the Local Journalism

Sustainability Act," said Zachary Richner, founder of the Empire State Local News Coalition. "New York is now the first state in the nation to incentivize hiring and retaining local journalists – a critical investment given that hundreds of New York's newspapers have closed since 2004, leaving too many New York communities without access to vital local information. The objectivity of this credit shows that there is a fair way for public policy to support local news without jeopardizing journalistic integrity. This program is a model for other states across the U.S. to follow as communities across the country raise their voices to save local news."

He added, "We're incredibly proud of the 200 newspapers in our coalition, which built an unprecedented grassroots movement in support of saving New York's local news industry in a few short months. We're especially grateful to Sen. Brad Hoylman-Sigal, whose tireless advocacy for this tax credit was instrumental in moving it through the legislative process. The coalition thanks Gov. Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, Assembly Sponsor Carrie Woerner, and the entire Legislature for supporting this industry-saving policy, and we look forward to continuing our advocacy for local news in the years to come.

"Other states and stakeholders interested in replicating this play-

book and hearing about lessons learned should reach out to us at info@savenylocalnews.com."

Since launching in February, the coalition has quickly mobilized stakeholders across the state to rally behind the bill. In addition to rallying with grassroots advocates in Westchester and Albany, members led petition drives, letter-writing campaigns, editorials and advertisements sounding the alarm on the decline of local journalism.

New York's leadership on this issue could change the course of local journalism in the U.S. The budget's inclusion of this tax credit comes at a watershed moment for the journalism industry: New York State has experienced hundreds of newspaper closures in the past few decades.

Comprising more than 200 print and online newspapers, the Empire State Local News Coalition launched in 2024 to advocate for sound public policy that ensures the important work of local news organizations can continue across New York state. Through our independent journalism, we aim to serve, inform, uplift and protect New Yorkers. We care deeply about our local communities, as well as the future of New York's free press.

For more information, visit SaveNYLocalNews.com.

Record number of participants at Liberty Drive Cleanup

The 33rd anniversary of the Liberty Drive Cleanup was highlighted with a campout on Friday evening with the cleanup on Saturday (Earth Day) coordinated by Wheatfield Councilman Larry Helwig. This was the largest group of Scouts attending this cleanup in the history of this event. Over 55 Cub Scouts, Scout BSA and their families from Troop 824B and Troop 824G in Sanborn and Pack 833 in Wheatfield attended the event on Liberty Drive.

A special thank you to Precious Plate from Liberty Drive for providing the gloves, grabbers, vests, drinks, doughnuts and bags and cash donations to all the Scouts; Frontier Fire on Liberty Drive for providing the restroom facilities; and the Niagara County Sewer District for providing the dumpster.

The following scouts attended this cleanup exercise: Annemarie Evans; Stacey, Neven, Reinier and Brian Markovich; Paul, Robert and John Tomlinson; Lorena Hannam; Chloe Coram; Ava and Julia Bordeleau; Maggie and Charles Scime; Chris Pappal; Jayden and Alvin Baines; Tim and Nate Synor; Avery Passero; Aedon Tavenier; Gregory and Vincent Pepe; Dave, Alexis, Joel, Sam and Darcy Greinert; Chris Porter; Steve Gullo; Scott Ferris; Brianna Dowden; Eric, Kim and Lucas Klavoon; Jen and Ella Banks; Alex and Jen Guido; John and Joe Dzierzewski; Steven and Douglas Pike; Daniel and Dereck Wade; Jessica, Emrys; Althea Chiodo; Andrew Evaldi; and Cooper and Teresa Armstrong. (Courtesy of Town of Wheatfield Councilman Larry Helwig)



Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

Founded February 14, 1987

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The Tribune is published weekly.

Display Ads Deadline: MONDAY 5 PM

New York State Press Association, Niagara County Builders Association, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, Wheatfield Business Association Inc., Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, The Niagara USA Chamber.

