

FUTURE OF LOCAL NEWS COMMISSION ACT

Our country was founded on the principle of freedom of the press, which is enshrined in the First Amendment of our Constitution. An informed citizenry depends on accurate and unbiased news reporting to inform the people's judgments. Our Founding Fathers understood the importance of journalism and the dangers of an ill-informed public. Thomas Jefferson famously wrote, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

However, the local news industry is in trouble. According to the Pew Research Center and the University of North Carolina, total newsroom employment, across newspapers, television, radio, and digital, dropped by roughly 25 percent from 2008 to 2019. The plunge in newspaper newsrooms alone was much worse, at 47 percent. Since 2004, over 2,100 local print outlets have closed. Over three million Americans do not have a local newspaper at all and many receive news from only one. At the end of 2019, the U.S. had 6,700 newspapers in circulation. And at least 1,000 qualify as "ghost newspapers," meaning they are so understaffed they do not have the capacity to inform readers about vital issues in their communities. The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the demise of the local news industry, as newspapers have closed during the crisis. To preserve and sustain local news across all States, territories and Tribal areas, it is crucial that Congress establish a federal advisory commission to examine this crisis and make recommendations on how best to fix it.

The Future of Local News Commission Act would create a commission to study the state of local news and its ability to sustain democracy by informing the American public about critical issues. Specifically, the commission would:

- Include 13 members with relevant experience—in print, digital, and broadcast news, as well as the business, civil society, and research communities—from diverse regions of the country;
- Examine the implications for the American democracy of the disappearance of local newspapers, digital native sites, and broadcasting outlets in every State and territory, and in rural, urban, suburban, insular, and Tribal communities, and those serving Black communities and non-English speaking communities;
- Assess the effectiveness of existing Federal laws, institutions, and programs in supporting the production of local news; and
- Provide recommendations on whether the Federal Government should create and could effectively implement a program to support independent, high-quality local news, and consider how such a program could be structured and financed to ensure the editorial integrity of news outlets, to keep them free from governmental or political control.

This legislation is supported by [PEN America](#); Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers; Alliance for Community Media; National Writers Union; Society of Professional Journalists; Ethnic Media Services; Online News Association; Free Press Action; National Society of Newspaper Columnists (NSNC); National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ); National Press Photographers Association (NPPA); Native American Journalists Association (NAJA); Society for News Design; Association of Alternative Newsmedia; American Journalism Project; Pulitzer Center; Writers Guild of America, East, AFL-CIO; Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO; The NewsGuild – Communications Workers of America (TNG-CWA); Society of Environmental Journalists; National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ); and Colorado Media Project.