

1 AN ACT concerning journalism.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the
5 Strengthening Community Media Act.

6 Section 5. Findings.

7 (a) Illinois benefits from robust local news services that
8 provide trusted and essential information to the community
9 that limits corruption, encourages citizen participation,
10 helps combat misinformation, and mitigates community and
11 individual alienation.

12 (b) Local news in Illinois and throughout the country is
13 struggling with newspaper advertising dropping 82% nationally
14 since 2000, contributing to a 57% drop in the number of
15 reporters at newspapers and thousands of closures.

16 (c) Local news outlets are trusted sources of information
17 for communities throughout Illinois and advertising spending
18 with these outlets carries a substantial benefit for the
19 effective dissemination of important government information to
20 the communities it serves.

21 (d) Government initiatives to increase spending on local
22 news advertising has been manifestly successful in both
23 supporting local news outlets and improving the information

1 diet of communities in several major cities.

2 (e) Illinois can and will implement such an initiative
3 while preserving the editorial independence of local news
4 outlets selling advertising space under this Act, and
5 recognizes that any diversion of advertising spending that has
6 the effect or appearance of an attempt to influence the
7 editorial content of a local news organization violates the
8 federal and State guarantees of freedom of the press and
9 freedom of speech.

10 Section 10. Definitions. As used in this Act:

11 "Department" means the Department of Commerce and Economic
12 Opportunity.

13 "Local news organization" means an entity that:

14 (1) engages professionals to create, edit, produce,
15 and distribute original content concerning matters of
16 public interest, through reporting activities, including
17 conducting interviews, observing current events, or
18 analyzing documents or other information;

19 (2) has at least one employee employed full-time for
20 30 hours a week or more dedicated to providing coverage of
21 Illinois or local Illinois community news and living
22 within 50 miles of the coverage area, who gathers,
23 prepares, collects, photographs, writes, edits, reports,
24 or publishes original local or State community news for
25 dissemination to the local or State community;

1 (3) in the case of print publications, has published
2 at least one print publication per month over the previous
3 12 months, and either holds a valid United States Postal
4 Service periodical permit or has at least 25% of its
5 content dedicated to local news;

6 (4) in the case of digital-only entities, has
7 published one piece about the community per week over the
8 previous 12 months and has at least 33% of its digital
9 audience in Illinois, averaged over a 12-month period;

10 (5) in the case of hybrid entities that that have both
11 print and digital outlets, meets the requirements in
12 either paragraph (3) or (4) of this definition;

13 (6) has disclosed in its print publication or on its
14 website its beneficial ownership or, in the case of a
15 not-for-profit entity, its board of directors;

16 (7) in the case of an entity that maintains tax status
17 under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue
18 Code, has declared the coverage of local or State news as
19 the stated mission in its filings with the Internal
20 Revenue Service; and

21 (8) has not received more than 50% of its gross
22 receipts for the previous year from political action
23 committees or other entities described in Section 527 of
24 the federal Internal Revenue Code, or from an organization
25 that maintains Section 501(c)(4) or 501(c)(6) status under
26 the federal Internal Revenue Code.

1 Section 15. Notice of sale of a local news organization. A
2 local news organization shall not be sold to a company without
3 giving written notice 120 days before the sales occurs to the
4 following:

5 (1) affected employees and representatives of affected
6 employees;

7 (2) the Department and the county government in which
8 the local news organization is located; and

9 (3) any in-State nonprofit organization in the
10 business of buying local news organizations.

11 Section 90. The Higher Education Student Assistance Act is
12 amended by adding Section 65.125 as follows:

13 (110 ILCS 947/65.125 new)

14 Sec. 65.125. Journalism Student Scholarship Program.

15 (a) As used in this Section, "local news organization" has
16 the meaning given to that term in the Strengthening Community
17 Media Act.

18 (b) In order to encourage academically talented Illinois
19 students to pursue careers in journalism, especially in
20 underserved areas of the State, and to provide those students
21 with financial assistance to increase the likelihood that they
22 will complete their full academic commitment and elect to
23 remain in Illinois to pursue a career in journalism, subject

1 to appropriation, not sooner than the 2025-2026 academic year,
2 the Commission shall implement and administer the Journalism
3 Student Scholarship Program. The Commission shall annually
4 award scholarships to persons preparing to work in Illinois,
5 with preference given to those preparing to work in
6 underserved areas. These scholarships shall be awarded to
7 individuals who make application to the Commission and agree
8 to sign an agreement under which the recipient pledges that,
9 within the 2-year period following the termination of the
10 academic program for which the recipient was awarded a
11 scholarship, the recipient shall:

12 (1) begin working in journalism in this State for a
13 period of not less than 2 years;

14 (2) fulfill this obligation at local news
15 organization; and

16 (3) upon request of the Commission, provide the
17 Commission with evidence that the recipient is fulfilling
18 or has fulfilled the terms of the teaching agreement
19 provided for in this subsection.

20 (c) An eligible student is a student who meets the
21 following qualifications:

22 (1) is a resident of this State and a citizen or
23 eligible noncitizen of the United States;

24 (2) is a high school graduate or a person who has
25 received an Illinois high school diploma;

26 (3) is enrolled or accepted, on at least a half-time

1 basis, at an institution of higher learning; and
2 (4) is pursuing a postsecondary course of study
3 leading to a career in journalism or a similar field.

4 (d) Each scholarship shall be used by the recipient for
5 the payment of tuition and fees at an institution of higher
6 learning.

7 (e) The Commission shall administer the Program and shall
8 adopt all necessary and proper rules not inconsistent with
9 this Section for its effective implementation.