

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Amid this public health emergency, the American people's need for reliable sources of information has never been greater. However, even as journalists are working tirelessly to deliver accurate reporting, the news workforce is facing an increasing likelihood of unprecedented layoffs. Absent immediate payroll assistance, many once-profitable media outlets – companies that put journalism first – will go under, and their news professionals will be out of work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the news industry's advertising revenues across all formats. Initial reporting estimates a 51% decline in spending on advertisements over March and April. This collapse is hitting digital-native outlets hardest, since most do not charge subscription fees and thus are disproportionately dependent on advertising revenue. For the professionals who work in digital newsrooms, federal financial support – whether by grant, loan, or other means – is all that stands between continuing to produce critical journalism and unemployment.

Unfortunately, many of the current federal support programs omit digital-native outlets from assistance. The Payroll Protection Program (PPP), for instance, is only available to companies with 500 or fewer staff. Accordingly, the structure of the digital news sector – with multiple independently-operated niche websites frequently being affiliated with a larger parent entity – forecloses PPP support. There have been recent efforts in Congress to protect local news outlets by clarifying that local publishers that meet the SBA's size standards and primarily serve a single city qualify for the PPP. We support and applaud these efforts. As we seek to keep America's journalists on their beats, however, we also encourage you to consider the needs of the digital news workforce, who provide similarly critical reporting but may not just serve a single region.

The top 37 digital-native sites – many of which are targeted to particular communities or industries – saw an average of 22 million unique visitors each in the last three months of 2018 alone. Clearly, digital news is stepping up to fill the gap left by cuts in local reporting by traditional newspapers. Digital-native outlets also give voice to stories which might not otherwise be reported by the national media. They are often the only entities employing journalists dedicated to covering specific neighborhoods, industries, scientific fields, or news from particular demographic perspectives.

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Digital-native outlets employ over 16,000 news professionals across the country. Millions of Americans depend on the distinctive reporting produced by these workers. Only the federal government can ensure these journalists continue covering their beats during this pandemic – and that the websites which are home to this reporting still exist once society reopens. Accordingly, we urge you to include payroll support – whether by grant or loan – for the digital news workforce in forthcoming stimulus legislation.

Sincerely,



Yvette D. Clarke
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

/s/ Sheila Jackson Lee


Sheila Jackson Lee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Vicente Gonzalez
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Lucille Roybal-Allard
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Adriano Espaillat
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Jamie Raskin
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Joe Neguse
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Grace Meng
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

/s/ G. K. Butterfield

G. K. Butterfield
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Chellie Pingree
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

/s/ Jan Schakowsky

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MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Jesús G. “Chuy” García
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Carolyn B. Maloney
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Eleanor Holmes Norton
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Debbie Dingell
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Rashida Tlaib
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Barbara Lee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Brenda Lawrence
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Anthony G. Brown
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Andy Levin
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Ruben Gallego
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Stephen F. Lynch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Ro Khanna
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Haley M. Stevens
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Adam B. Schiff
MEMBER OF CONGRESS