

AN ACT concerning journalism.

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

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

Section 5. Findings.

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

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

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

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

diet of communities in several major cities.

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

Section 10. Definitions. As used in this Act:

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

"Local news organization" means an entity that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- (1) affected employees and representatives of affected employees;
- (2) the Department and the county government in which the local news organization is located; and
- (3) any in-State nonprofit organization in the business of buying local news organizations.

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

(110 ILCS 947/65.125 new)

Sec. 65.125. Journalism Student Scholarship Program.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

basis, at an institution of higher learning; and

(4) is pursuing a postsecondary course of study leading to a career in journalism or a similar field.

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

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