



# THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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January 31, 2022

Dear Delegate Alfonso Lopez,

The NewsGuild-CWA is the largest union of journalists and media workers in North America. With about 25,000 members we represent workers at publications large and small, including the Roanoke Times, The Virginian-Pilot and the Charlottesville Daily Progress.

Across the U.S. we've lost half of all newspaper employees in about a decade going from 71,070 reporters, editors, photographers and other news employees in 2008 to just 30,820 in 2020.

This rate of job loss is comparable to the job losses of coal miners in the U.S. during that same period.

But losing journalists in our communities has huge implications for our democracy. With fewer journalists to cover city hall or state government, our citizens are less informed and those in power aren't held to account. Corruption can flourish, taxes can rise and partisanship spreads.

At the same time, we've lost these jobs, we've experienced a record wave of media worker unionization. Since 2018, about 4,900 journalists have unionized with us from about 100 publications. That includes The Virginian-Pilot workers, who unionized with us in September 2018. The Charlottesville Daily Progress unionized in October 2019. And the Roanoke Times unionized in April 2020, right after the start of the pandemic.

But even in a few short years the number of journalists at these publications has dropped. When the Virginian-Pilot and Daily Press, Virginia Gazette and Tidewater Review organized a union with us in 2018 they had 101 journalists. Today they're down to just 35.

Our union is focused on saving jobs to save our industry and our democracy. We enthusiastically support Virginia House Bill 1217, which would provide a tax credit up to \$5,000 in the first year and up to \$2,500 for years 2-5.

We do see some areas for improvement as we also worked to strengthen the language in the Local Journalism Sustainability Act at the federal level.

## **Strengthen the definition of a journalist**

We should make supporting full-time local jobs the priority and we'd suggest adjusting the "who provides at least 100 hours of service during the taxable year" to "provides services for an average of not less than 30 hours per week for each week." We'd further support adding in "edits" and "publishes" in the description of duties of a local news journalist to include any copy

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Martha Waggoner  
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editors or others improving the news coverage before it is published and other supporting journalist staffers such as social media editors and page designers.

**Improvements to “Local newspaper” definition**

We support making sure publishers carry media liability insurance during the covered period to make sure we’re supporting actual news organizations. And we suggest including the publishers whose parent organization may have more than 750 employees, but locally employ fewer. The example being Lee Enterprises or Tribune Company, both of which own several Virginia newsrooms. This can be achieved with an aggregation rule. We also suggest excluding organizations that are 501(c)(4), which can be responsible for “pink slime journalism.”

Virginia needs the passage of H.B. 1217 to make sure Virginians have a local news voice. They depend on local news that covers politics, education, the humanities and sports. A strong free press is the foundation of a strong democracy. We are excited about the introduction of this legislation and call on its swift passage.

Sincerely,

Jon Schleuss  
President  
The NewsGuild-CWA