

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

The American people will need reliable sources of information to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic—both to remain healthy and to return to contributing to their local economies. At this pivotal moment, however, news professionals across all formats are experiencing layoffs and furloughs as a result of the pandemic. Absent immediate, temporary payroll support to weather the pandemic's impact, more news professionals will lose their jobs at a time when their work is critical for our country.

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic devastation has rippled out to the news industry. Initial reporting estimated a 51 percent decline in spending on advertisements over March and April. When Americans stopped shopping, retailers stopped advertising. When Americans quit traveling, airlines and hotels quit advertising.

This pause in advertising has hurt digital-native news outlets in particular. These organizations rely primarily on advertising revenue to pay the bills. As a result, across the country, news professionals working for digital-native outlets need immediate, temporary federal financial support. Whether through grants, loans, or other systems, the federal government must help ensure these professionals can stay on the job so that Americans do not lose access to reliable news and information.

Digital-native organizations, just like broadcast television, radio, and newspapers, are vital to the country and local communities. Unfortunately, these organizations cannot access federal support through most current programs, including the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Digital-native news organizations tend to employ more than 500 people, and, since they exist in cyberspace, their structure is such that a single company often operates multiple, targeted websites. Efforts in Congress to require that the Small Business Administration (SBA) waive affiliation rules to allow individual newspaper, radio, and television outlets to access funding will offer no relief to digital-native organizations. We support these efforts; however, Congress cannot leave these companies and their workforce of more than 16,000 behind.

Americans have come to rely on digital-native news organizations. According to the Pew Research Center, the top 37 digital-native sites saw an average of 22 million unique visitors each in the last three months of 2018 alone. People go to these websites to understand how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, learn what restaurants and other businesses are open in their neighborhoods, and read about economic development in their cities and towns.

Unless Congress acts, the ability of Americans to turn to these trusted news sources stands to be lost—not because the organizations are inviable in the long term but because of a catastrophic shock to the entire

economy. For this reason, we ask that you include payroll support for digital-native news professionals in the next COVID-19 related legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Patty Murray

Patty Murray
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator