



June 19, 2019

Dear Governor Murphy:

As a group of organizations based within and beyond New Jersey, we are writing to respectfully urge your support for full funding of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium. As the first of its kind in the nation, the Consortium has the capacity to transform media in New Jersey and serve as a national model for other states to address their own local-news crises.

We thank you for signing the Consortium into law last year. The creation of the Consortium was the first step in ensuring that residents around the state receive the news and information that they need to participate fully in their communities. We're calling on you to fund the consortium at the \$2 million level which is currently in the FY 2020 State Budget now before the Legislature. This innovative nonprofit needs this allotment to implement the Consortium and fulfill its mission. The Consortium would use this public funding to support quality local journalism, promising media startups and other efforts meant to better inform communities in New Jersey.

An informed citizenry and electorate are necessary for any democracy to thrive, and a vibrant local media is needed for residents to be aware of what's happening in their communities. This is especially true in a state like New Jersey, with 565 municipalities, each bustling with its own unique issues, challenges and developments. Local news is an invaluable resource that keeps residents informed, civically engaged and invested.

When communities don't have the news and information that they need, there is a drop in civic participation, people do not seek elected office and political polarization becomes more entrenched.¹ In light of the local-news crisis in New Jersey, which has seen thousands of journalists lose their jobs in recent years, the consortium is needed now more than ever.

Nationwide, thousands of communities are at risk of becoming news deserts². Over the past 15 years, more than one in five newspapers have closed and today half of the nation's counties have only one local news source. States are now looking to step in to address this growing crisis, and we believe that the Consortium can inspire other states to replicate this model to inform and engage their own residents.

¹ "Want to Reduce Political Polarization? Save Your Local Newspaper," Nieman Lab, Feb. 11, 2019: <https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/02/want-to-reduce-political-polarization-save-your-local-newspaper/>

² "The Expanding News Desert." <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>

Having trusted, vibrant and accurate information is the lifeblood of a thriving democracy which is one of the reasons why the creation of the Consortium has received national attention³ as an innovative response to the local-news crisis, one that would ensure a public-interest media system thrives in the 21st century.

The people of New Jersey — and others around the country — are closely watching to see if this initiative that you signed into law is successful. For that to happen, we strongly urge you to fund the Civic Information Consortium at the \$2 million level currently in the FY 2020 Budget.

Sincerely,

Action Together New Jersey
Alliance for Community Media
Bergen Volunteer Center
coLab Arts
Environmental New Jersey
Free Press Action
Media Mobilizing Project
Newark Science and Sustainability, Inc
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Labor
PEN America
Social and Food Justice Director of Trinity Episcopal Church

³ “New Jersey Poised to Invest \$5 Million in Local Journalism,” CNN, July 3, 2018: <https://money.cnn.com/2018/07/03/media/new-jersey-civic-info-bill/index.html>

“News from Your Neighborhood, Brought to You By the State of New Jersey, *The New York Times*, July 30, 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/30/nyregion/nj-legislature-community-journalism.html>