

Testimony supporting Raised Senate Bill 1043: An Act Concerning The Hartford Courant.

March 17, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Rebecca Lurye and I am the union chair of the Hartford Courant Guild, a unit of The NewsGuild-CWA. I'm also the Courant's Hartford city reporter, doing a job that was shared by three to four people only a few years ago.

I'm writing because America's longest continuously published newspaper is under attack, its survival threatened by far-off corporate leaders who are diminishing the vital journalism we produce in their pursuit of the next penny.

Our union represents more than 40 journalists at the Hartford Courant.

Some of those reporters, photographers and editors have been with the Courant for decades, the last 20 or so years spent weathering changes to the journalism industry. A staff that neared 400 newsroom employees in the 1990s was down to about 70 by the time we organized our union two years ago.

But in November 2019, the decline of newspapers gained a very real and sinister face in Hartford in the form of Alden Global Capital, a predatory, slash-and-burn hedge fund that bought a large stake of our parent company, Tribune Publishing. These bad actors are now set to take ownership of The Courant in mere months, at which point we anticipate devastating cuts.

Already, the paper has eliminated 20 newsroom positions through buyouts and attrition since last January.

The end of 2020 brought the permanent closure of our Broad Street office, and our printing operation, which was outsourced to Springfield, eliminating 151 jobs in Hartford.

Meanwhile, coverage of the Greater Hartford region's suburbs has grown scarce, with three reporters tracking the metro area. A staff of three photographers spans the entire state.

A sports desk that formerly covered the Yankees, Red Sox and Patriots now lacks the resources to cover even local high schools.

A once-proud investigative desk, one that exposed corruption and uncovered injustice on its way to Pulitzer Prize nominations, is effectively gone.

If this hedge fund follows the playbook it has used at numerous other newspapers around the country, the Courant will soon be a shell of what it is now.

Still there remains hope. Numerous news publications, in Connecticut and elsewhere, continue to invest in journalism under the stewardship of responsible, civic-minded, sometimes non-profit ownership groups. With new management, The Courant could rebuild its staff and redouble its commitment to important reporting.

We believe ample community support exists to liberate the Courant from a hedge fund content to let it die. We urge the legislature to do anything and everything in its power to protect and preserve this institution.

- Rebecca Lurye, [rjlurye@gmail.com](mailto:rjlurye@gmail.com)