When I started working at The Glastonbury Citizen in 2002, two or three reporters often covered town meetings: me, Peter Marteka from The Courant, and eventually a reporter from The Reminder. Today, when I go to Stafford 's town meetings, I am the only reporter there. Tolland County is Connecticut's only news desert, but this happens in towns across the state. As newspapers shutter and the remaining newsrooms shrink, communities lose touch with what 's happening locally.

In 2023, 2.5 local newspapers closed their doors each week, according to the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. This is fundamentally bad for democracy and Connecticut's citizenry. The Democracy Fund said it best: "Studies have long demonstrated that strong local journalism can encourage higher voter turnout, counter polarizing narratives, expose corruption, and lead to people feeling a strong sense of community. " In Connecticut, we're lucky to have new media organizations stepping in to fill the gap at the state level, but they can't get to every one of the 169 towns. Those of us operating at a hyperlocal level often have smaller pools of advertisers and readers to draw from, putting us at a disadvantage even though we're covering the local issues no one else is.

For much of my career, I worked in tech journalism, covering digital media and marketing, so I've followed the news industry closely. Nimble upstarts keep local news alive; creative funding strategies are the only way to keep this critical industry going. Any government that values an informed citizenry should seek ways to help the independent press stay viable so we can continue informing our communities about the issues that impact them daily. HB 5978 will benefit non-profit as well as for-profit news organizations.