



June 30, 2018

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: New Jersey Civic Information Consortium Bill

Dear Governor Murphy:

As leaders of national organizations that believe that strong local news and information are essential for communities and democracy to thrive, we urge you to sign and fully fund the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium Bill (S2317/A3628).

Fostering informed and civically engaged communities depends on access to accurate, relevant, timely and trustworthy information. This novel legislation would make New Jersey a national model for how to create and support a 21st-century public-interest media system rooted in local communities, based on collaboration and focused on lifting up unheard voices.

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium would invest in promising projects to strengthen local news, community information, civic technology and civic engagement across New Jersey. It would be a first-in-the-nation public/private collaboration, bringing five of the state's higher-education institutions together with media leaders, civic technologists, community groups and local residents.

Research shows that when local news disappears, civic participation drops, governments go unwatched and constituents view lawmakers as less responsive to their needs. The consortium would cultivate new ways of informing our communities. It would shed light on the lives, talents, dreams and needs of our state's residents, including some who have been left stranded in news deserts, their voices muffled.

The budget before you includes an initial seed investment of \$5 million from the Trust Fund for the Support of Public Broadcasting. This nonprofit fund would seek out, evaluate and invest in proposals from the media and technology sectors and community organizations. These projects would be matched with five college and university partners: Montclair State University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, the College of New Jersey, Rowan University and Rutgers University.

The consortium would greatly benefit our members and allies in New Jersey and show the rest of the country new ways to respond to a crisis in journalism that has shuttered local newsrooms and taken reporters off essential beats. It would support innovative tech projects dedicated to informing local communities. Such projects would amplify diverse voices and foster a more engaged and informed New Jersey, better equipped to tackle complex issues and spark positive change.

New Jersey rightfully prides itself on being a place where people from all walks of life come to raise families, build careers and address challenges head on. Public-interest media have long played a vital role in those activities, a role that trends in the media marketplace now threaten. This legislation could propel New Jersey into a position of national leadership in digital-media innovation.



We strongly urge you to sign S2317/A3628 to create the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium and fund this effort in the 2019 state budget. Thank you for your consideration and leadership on these crucial issues.

Sincerely,

Craig Aaron, Free Press and Free Press Action Fund
Steven Renderos, Center for Media Justice
Brandi Collins-Dexter, Color Of Change
Yosef Getachew, Common Cause
Heidi Hess, CREDO
David Segal, Demand Progress
Jim Dean, Democracy for America
Summer Lopez, PEN America