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News Guild Launches Effort To Encourage The Sun's Sale to Local Non-Profits

Baltimore (MD) – The Washington-Baltimore News Guild and the NewsGuild-CWA are launching a campaign to support efforts to return The Baltimore Sun to local ownership under a non-profit model, reinvesting profit back into the paper that has been Maryland's news source for nearly two centuries.

The Save Our Sun campaign comes in the midst of a global pandemic, at a time when the public's need for fact-based, accountability journalism has never been more relevant — and when the Sun's survival is at risk.

"We cannot lose reporting capacity in this critical moment. When a community loses a newspaper, corruption goes up, partisanship goes up and your taxes go up," said Jon Schleuss, the president of NewsGuild-CWA. *"The Sun holds the powerful accountable and it does that for the people of Maryland."*

Last year, Alden Global Capital, a New York-based hedge fund that owns more than 100 newspapers, purchased 32% of Tribune Publishing stock, making them the largest shareholder of Tribune and giving them two seats on the Tribune company board. Tribune owns The Sun, The Chicago Tribune, The Hartford Courant and several other major newspapers. It is expected that Alden will work to obtain majority ownership of Tribune Publishing, and The Baltimore Sun, as early as this summer.

Ted Venetoulis, an advisor to the local effort, indicated *"that in today's newspaper environment, the community might be better served with a newspaper under local ownership and managed as a nonprofit institution."*

Alden, with a record of voracious cost cutting to boost profit margins, reduced the staff of the Denver Post by 70% over a seven-year period. Since Alden became a major shareholder, Tribune has reduced staff through buyouts and announced a shakeup in leadership. Now the company is making more cuts amid the coronavirus pandemic, and The Sun is facing a significant crisis. Tribune Publishing has imposed pay cuts and furloughs on non-union Sun employees and is at this moment negotiating pay cuts and furloughs for Guild employees at The Sun, too.

Even before this public health crisis, members of the NewsGuild who work at Tribune Publishing papers had already petitioned the company to consider any purchasing offers from local and civic minded groups. And local foundations in Baltimore are also eager to see The Sun return to local ownership, though Tribune has not indicated the paper is for sale.

"We are proud to be a part of this effort to galvanize local support behind our local newspaper," said Matthew D. Gallagher, President and CEO of the Goldseker Foundation. *"The Baltimore*

Sun has served as a beacon for our city and this new ownership model will preserve the daily news source we've come to depend on."

The Abell Foundation, created by the family that founded and sold The Sun, and its president Robert C. Embry Jr. led previous efforts to return The Sun to local ownership – along with Ted Venetoulis and other local citizens. Embry and Venetoulis continue to pursue local ownership. Venetoulis authored a report published by The Abell Foundation in 2015 about the efficacy of not-for-profit digital newsrooms.

"If a city loses its professional sports teams, it loses its spirit. If a city loses its newspapers, it loses its soul," explained Venetoulis. *"We fight to keep our ball clubs. It's time to fight to keep our newspaper."*

Since its first issue, published in 1837, The Baltimore Sun has recorded the breadth of national and local news for generations. Baltimore Sun reporters have dispatched news from Civil War battlefields to suburban Maryland county seats. The paper has chronicled the life of the arts community, and its sports teams. Most recently, its reporters uncovered corruption, including the recent coverage of former Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh's Health Holly scandal.

"We started Save Our Sun to ensure we have the resources we need to keep doing our jobs, preserve newspapering in Baltimore and prepare a national model for local communities to buy their newspaper back," said Liz Bowie, a union leader and reporter at The Sun. *"We believe that local control will provide better stewardship of The Sun, while also protecting jobs and bringing better benefits and working conditions."*

The new ownership model, as a nonprofit, would sustain the paper while putting profits back into the creation of quality journalism for Marylanders. Examples of this model include the Texas Tribune, the Salt Lake Tribune and MinnPost in Minnesota. In addition, The Seattle Times has launched an ambitious national effort to rebuild trusted local ownership of newspapers, and the Los Angeles Times has grown under the new local ownership of medical entrepreneur Patrick Soon-Shiong.

Nonprofit ownership would mean that The Sun's revenue, instead of going to shareholders in a public company, could be poured back into making it a better paper. This would mean more local jobs, better management, more robust news coverage, city and state accountability and overall, nonprofit sustainability.

Learn more via the campaign website: www.saveourbaltimoresun.com

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