Over the past year, local journalism has been more important – and more needed – than ever. From the COVID-19 pandemic to the reignited social justice movement to the explosive 2020 U.S. presidential election and its aftermath, people have been turning to news publishers, day in and day out, to keep them up to date on how the changes happening around the world affect their daily lives. However, while news has been more in-demand than at any time in recent history, news publishers have been struggling more than ever.

It is impossible to deny the negative impact of the tech platforms on the industry’s financial health. Major tech platforms like Facebook and Google exert their dominance over the digital marketplace, setting the rules for news publishers and determining how journalism is displayed, prioritized and monetized. They also capture the vast majority of all digital advertising dollars because of their unique ability to collect consumer data across the web.

Through their anticompetitive behavior, the tech companies have disrupted the relationships publishers have with their audiences by building walled gardens that seldom results in a click, making it difficult for publishers to pay journalists. Because of the platforms’ dominance in the ad tech ecosystem, when users do finally click through, news publishers may receive less than half of every advertising dollar. The platforms have failed to compensate news publishers consistently and adequately for use of their content, which is needed to ensure news publishers are around to cover the next crisis. The platforms pay to license music, sports clips and other forms of content, but they have fought all attempts to require them to pay to display news.

As highlighted by recent global developments, including the European Union and Australia, the world is moving towards a new and more equitable compensation system for publishers. Policymakers in the U.S. previously proposed legislation that would provide a safe harbor for news publishers to collectively negotiate with the platforms for a better deal. Now, the “Journalism Competition and Preservation Act” is expected to be reintroduced in the House by Antitrust Subcommittee Chairman David Cicilline (D-RI) and Ranking Member Ken Buck (R-CO), and in the Senate by Antitrust Subcommittee Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Senator John N. Kennedy (R-LA).

It is simply not possible for most individual news publishers to challenge the basic terms offered by the online behemoths. The platforms are simply much too big and much too influential, which is why they have been the targets of multiple antitrust lawsuits.

Contrary to the platforms’ claims, the deals European and Australian lawmakers required them to reach with news publishers did not “break the internet” or in any way harm or punish end users. Instead, they have shown that there is not only an ability to provide sustainable options for news, but a desire from the public to do so.

What news publishers are asking for in the U.S. is pretty simple. American publishers are not asking for forced payments or a “link tax,” as some have called it. They simply want the opportunity to seek better deals for everyone, and to work with the platforms rather than against them to build a better future for news.

The “Journalism Competition and Preservation Act” would establish a process that allows publishers to reap – and sow – the rewards of their work. Quality journalism supports democracy, and the price of inaction – the disappearance of quality news – is too great. It is more important than ever that our elected representatives support legislation that will bring value back to those who create journalism.