



THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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September 17, 2021

Mike Reed
Chief Executive Officer
Gannett Co., Inc.

Dear Mike,

As president of the NewsGuild-CWA, representing employees at nearly 50 Gannett newsrooms, I am deeply concerned by the culture of overwork and unpaid overtime that employees say is widespread at the company.

As I am sure you are aware, last week an Arizona Republic employee shared publicly her experience working many hours of unpaid overtime as a young reporter at Gannett because of the culture fostered at the company that requires overwork to get ahead. A top editor who has been at Gannett for two decades appeared to confirm this.

“Every business exploits the young - it’s called gaining experience, and I don’t regret it one bit,” he wrote, in part. “The only way to do really groundbreaking work when your (sic) starting out is to work night (sic) and weekends.” He then added, “Prove yourself and they’ll pay you.”

Unfortunately, this view is not an outlier at Gannett. Over the last several days, a pattern emerged as many other Gannett employees shared similar experiences, publicly and privately. They described having to work nights and weekends to meet production goals and intense pressure to not record overtime.

This kind of illegal exploitation — which is widespread in the field — is a major reason so many talented journalists have left the industry. It is heartbreaking to hear story after story of journalists, predominantly women and people of color, who have left for other careers because they did not want to, or could not afford to, make the kind of illegal sacrifices demanded of them. The public acknowledgment of a painful practice at Gannett has struck a nerve.

The Guild, made up of hundreds of Gannett journalists, is launching an investigation of the company's culture and practices. To start, we will be surveying employees about their unpaid overtime experiences.

We urge you to investigate throughout the company as well. Although Gannett vowed to follow wage-and-hour laws in an email to Republic journalists on Monday, this one message is insufficient to rectify the problem across the network.

Martha Waggoner
Chairperson

Jon Schleuss
President

Marian Needham
Executive Vice President

CWA|SCA Canada President: Martin O’Hanlon

Vice Presidents: Diane Mastrull, Kevin Flowers, Michael Cabanatuan, Bill Baker, Jeff Gordon

We call on Gannett to immediately:

- Communicate to all staff (union and not yet union) that basic labor protections under the federal Fair Labor and Standards Act will be respected.
- Instruct all employees to log past overtime hours now and provide a method to do so.
- Instruct all employees to log all overtime going forward.
- Pledge that no Gannett worker will face reprisals of any kind for doing so.

To end this culture of exploitation for the future and repair Gannett's reputation as a place that best-in-class journalists want to work, the company must also agree to reasonable commitments in its union contracts.

In negotiations this week with the Arizona Republic Guild, Gannett counsel Michael Rybicki and Executive Editor Greg Burton expressed support for a living wage and a reasonable work/life balance for all employees. Prove it.

Gannett should immediately:

- Accept the Guild's common-sense Wage proposals at all Gannett newspapers currently in bargaining, among other provisions.
- Accept the Guild's Hours and Overtime proposals at all Gannett newspapers currently in bargaining, which reassert a commitment to following overtime law and provide for fair compensation when employees are called back to work on their time off.

We commend Gannett for disavowing the notion that employees should work unpaid overtime to advance in our industry. We look forward to you taking action to ensure such a promise is followed across the company now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Schleuss', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Schleuss
President, NewsGuild-CWA