

To : A.G. Sulzberger, *Publisher, New York Times*
Cc: Meredith Kopit Levien, *President and CEO, New York Times*
From : The Media and Democracy Project
Carolyn Barclift, Noelle Pellowski, Denise Fazio, Nora Swallows, and
Annette Damey
Date : January 20, 2024
Re : Public Editor/Ombuds Position and Duties

We are asking for the reinstatement of a public editor at the *New York Times*, and for this position to be independent of the newsroom and management. The intentional move by the *New York Times* to social media for public feedback in 2017 has been a failure. Back then you wrote, “*Our followers on social media and our readers across the internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be. Our responsibility is to empower all of those watchdogs, and to listen to them, rather than to channel their voice through a single office.*” The NYT has over 10 million subscribers; the reach of the newspaper extends beyond our nation’s borders. Turning the job of a public editor over to social media and the Reader Center has devolved into grievance, with shock comments and trolling, often of no value to the public or the newspaper. A public editor's job is not only to provide constructive criticism and direct contact with journalists and editors, but also to open a window to the public as to how the newsroom functions. This position is integral to winning back the trust of readers at a time when trust in the media is at an [all-time low](#).

In [The Modern News Ombudsman: A USER'S GUIDE, Jeffrey Dvorkin](#) answers the question, **“Why should a newspaper or broadcaster have an ombuds?”**

- To improve the quality of news reporting by monitoring accuracy, fairness, good taste and balance.
- To help his or her news organization become more accessible and accountable to the public and, thus, to become more credible.
- To increase the awareness of its news professionals about the public’s concerns.
- To save time for publishers and senior editors, or broadcasters and news directors, by channeling complaints and other inquiries to the appropriate individual.
- To resolve some complaints that might otherwise become costly lawsuits.

Some media outlets maintain a public editor, among them PBS, *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Stars and Stripes*. [Some media critics and experts argue that the public editor role is important for holding journalists accountable and fostering trust with readers](#). The *Toronto Star* keeps the public editor position because it values the feedback and concerns of its readers, and is committed to accountability and transparency in its journalism: [“The public editor serves as an independent and impartial office](#) that handles readers' queries about accuracy and

journalistic standards, in line with the *Star's* commitment to accountability and transparency." "The public editor also writes a weekly column about journalism issues and oversees the *Star's* standards and ethics."

We believe that as the pre-eminent American news organization, the New York Times, has an additional responsibility to help rebuild confidence in journalism by restoring its public editor position. We are asking for the reinstatement of a public editor, and for this position to be independent of the newsroom and its management. This is a stand-alone position that can't be filled by an outside contractor.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your reply.