TESTIMONY OF

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AT THE

"SPOTLIGHT HEARING" ON PROPOSED MERGER OF PARAMOUNT-SKYDANCE WITH WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

HOSTED BY SENATOR U.S. SENATOR CORY BOOKER (D-NJ), RANKING MEMBER OF THE SENATE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, COMPETITION POLICY, AND CONSUMER RIGHTS

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I am Michael Isaac, Director of Legal Services for the Writers Guild of America East. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the threat that the proposed merger of Paramount and Warner Brothers poses to workers and consumers. Thank you Senator Booker for hosting this event and thank you to all of the senators here. While we are also disappointed that this is not a bipartisan hearing, that should not stop us from drawing attention to this dangerous merger.

Together with our sister union WGA West, the WGA represent a total of about 18,000 creative professionals who write news and entertainment programming in television, film, radio, cable, and streaming. Guild members write for film, episodic television, and late night and comedy programming. Almost all the professional scripted content you see on streaming, in theatres, or on TV is written by our members.

Our members also include writers, producers, assignment editors, and graphic artists in television and radio news, including ABC, CBS, and MS NOW. The Guild also represents Web journalists, including writers and podcasters at sites like Vox Media, Huffington Post, Slate, and Hearst.

For decades, the WGA has called attention to the threat that concentrated market power in media poses to workers, consumers, and the diversity of content and viewpoints.

When news broke that Netflix and Paramount were bidding to acquire Warner Brothers, the Guild spoke out forcefully against either merger because no matter who acquires Warner Brothers, the result of media consolidation is always the same: fewer jobs, fewer options for consumers, and higher prices. While Paramount stands poised to acquire Warner Brothers, this merger can and should be prevented because it represents a further erosion of competition in an already consolidated market for entertainment, and a unique threat to a free and impendent press.

Decades of consolidation have led to a broken system that is dominated by a handful of studios. Today there are only six major buyers of scripted film and TV: Disney, Netflix, Amazon/MGM, Warner Bros. / Discovery, Paramount and NBCUniversal. These are vertically integrated companies, producing content as well as distributing that content around the world on their own streaming services. If Warner merges with Paramount that combined company would immediately become the largest employer of our members -- a media behemoth with tremendous leverage to reduce content, raise prices, increase control of production, suppress member compensation, worsen working conditions – and silence the voices of our members.

At the same time, Paramount is poised to dominate the news business by controlling both CBS News and CNN. It is not hard to predict how this will impact how Americans receive news because we have already seen a transformation at CBS News in the wake of its merger with Skydance. Under its new leadership CBS imposed mass layoffs and sought to appease bad faith and partisan critics instead of standing by the journalists who have built its reputation.

These outcomes are not inevitable. They are the result of policy choices—and Congress and our antitrust enforcers have the tools to change course if they have the courage to use them.

For those of us who grew up relying on the CBS Evening News, CBS Mornings, and 60 Minutes, it has been sad and frustrating to see these trusted institutions undermined in the leadup to and in the wake of Paramount's merger with Skydance.

Based on its recent actions, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Paramount sought to obtain regulatory approval for its merger with Skydance by appeasing the administration's bad faith attacks on the media. One notorious example is President Trump's baseless lawsuit against CBS News alleging bias at 60 Minutes, which surely would have been tossed out of court had the company not paid a $16 million settlement in July 2025. This was a betrayal of CBS's own employees at 60 Minutes, including the Guild members who work on the program and take seriously the journalistic standards that the program has worked to maintain. CBS, of course, denied that the settlement was tied to the merger, yet I believe that its motives became even clearer when it cancelled the Late Show immediately after Stephen Colbert joked about the settlement. The result is the layoff of the entire staff who work on the show, including the Guild-represented writing team. The message to artists is clear: watch what you say or you will be next.

CBS's appeasement of bad faith attacks on the news media did not stop there. CBS acquiesced to FCC Chair Brendan Carr's demand that it appoint an Ombudsman to combat allegations of media bias. CBS eliminated its diversity initiatives and disbanded its race and culture unit. A Guild member was reprimanded for writing accurately that RFJ Jr. has spread misinformation about vaccines. That member was among the first to be laid off when Skydance took over.

CBS's news programming has increasingly been marked by its new owners, notably by hiring CBS Bari Weiss as Editor in Chief. Her prior experience was not in television journalism, but from running The Free Press, a website with political leanings that align with Paramount's new owner David Ellison. The Free Press writers now routinely appear as commentators on CBS's streaming platform and links to Free Press articles are all over CBS News's website. We have also seen well-researched and reported stories on 60 Minutes held back for flimsy reasons. And there have been numerous high profile departures from CBS News, each with the same explanation: they cannot maintain their journalistic integrity while complying with the political demands of the new leadership.

Predictably, the Paramount-Skydance merger led to massive job losses almost immediately. In October 2025 Paramount cut about 1,000 jobs. About 100 were at CBS News, including Guild members. But that was not enough for the new owners. Less than a month ago, CBS News rolled out another wave of layoffs, this time eliminating CBS News Radio entirely, which had been in operation for nearly 100 years. More Guild members at CBS News lost their jobs, including journalists with decades of experience. In all, about a third of our members under our national agreement were either laid off or were pushed into early retirement by accepting a buyout offer within the past year.

The employees who have remained at CBS News have struggled to maintain the same level of quality with low staffing levels, working longer days and weeks. CBS News resisted providing fair pay to those employees, which led the entire Guild-represented staff at CBS 24/7 to walk off the job for a fair contract, which they ultimately won.

There has been reporting that the prospect of a Paramount – Warner merger has set off anxiety among employees at CNN. They have every reason to feel that way. Paramount's relentless job cutting and political interference will not stop with CBS News.

As a viewer, it seems like there are an endless number of places to find content, but in reality these platforms and networks are owned and controlled by a small number of companies.

Most Guild members who write for the screen or episodic TV are always looking for their next project in order to maintain a livable income and to provide health insurance for themselves and their families. With a merger of Paramount and Warner, those work opportunities will be far fewer.

The combination of Paramount & Warner Bros would create the largest employer of controlling nearly a quarter of TV earnings and over 20% of screen earnings.   A combined Paramount-Warner Bros. Discovery company would also control 33% of the market for highly-paid screenwriters, 32% of the market for highly-compensated TV writers on what are called “overall deals” and 27% of the market for writing on half-hour TV series. These amounts are roughly double Paramount’s current share of the market, if not more.

This consolidation stifles competition from independent producers and distributors, enables monopsony power over writers and other industry workers, and gives conglomerates outsized control over what content reaches audiences.

Because these companies like Warner and Paramount are vertically integrated, players in the entertainment market must be both producers and streaming distributors to be competitive, which is a significant barrier for new, smaller, independent companies to come into the market - increasing the big companies’ control over production markets and writers. It’s rare that you truly get a market for a new project with multiple outlets competing. In the 2024-2025 television season, nearly three-quarters of online scripted content on the major streaming platforms was self-supplied.

This is a business where competition between employers supports creativity and variety in the marketplace of ideas but Wall Street doesn’t want that. They want more mergers because they want the remaining companies to be able to continue to raise prices while putting out less content, leaving consumers to pay more for less, and resulting in fewer jobs and a company with even greater power to demand more work for less pay.

The tools to block the merger are available. As the D.C. District Court for observed in its decision blocking Penguin Random House’s proposed acquisition of Simon & Schuster, this leads to diminished variety in the marketplace of ideas and less diversity of content.

We know the impact of consolidation from past mergers:

The Warner-Discovery merger from only a few years ago showed consolidation also hurts diversity by increasing the power of gatekeepers to decide whose stories are told. That merger caused several cancellations of projects created by people from marginalized communities. After the Warner-Discovery merger, the company canceled, pulled, or wrote off $2 billion in content.

The Disney-Fox merger, which combined two major producers and distributors, has been terrible for writers. It clearly enabled the company to reduce output and hire fewer writers, as well as shut down businesses the company acquired from Fox that competed with Disney’s like Blue Sky Studios. Disney closed the competing Fox animation studio, pulled back content it had licensed to Netflix, banned Netflix from advertising on its television entertainment networks, and pressed creators and other workers to forego sharing in future licensing revenue on Disney shows. Disney's serial acquisitions of Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and Fox have reduced innovative development in favor of focusing on franchise films, reducing variety and choice at the theater. The company now owns two of the four largest streaming services in the U.S., Disney+ and Hulu, and has announced plans to combine them.

A merger is not necessary because Warner Brothers is profitable. It has 128 million streaming subscribers, and the company projects growing to 150 million subscribers by the end of 2026. Its studios enjoyed a "record-setting year" in 2025, surpassing $4 billion in global box office revenue.

The Guild has done its part to push back against these developments. We have negotiated diversity initiatives into our collective bargaining agreements that cannot be eliminated at the owner's whim. We have guaranteed severance and seniority protections in our contracts in the event of layoffs. And we will defend any member who is punished or fired for upholding journalistic standards against political attacks. But more needs to be done to prevent the drive towards consolidation that is at the heart of the problem. And that is why the Paramount-Warner Bothers merger must be stopped. Block the merger.