

Why Whistleblowers Don't Trust a State-Funded Press

When you blow the whistle, you learn very quickly how power really works. Not in theory. Not in press releases. In practice.

You learn which doors open — and which ones never do.

So when I see the State handing out **€9.5 million** in journalism funding through schemes administered by **Coimisiún na Meán**, I don't see support for democracy. I see a warning sign.

The money is tied to reassuring labels: *local democracy, courts reporting, under-reported issues*. It flows to dozens of media outlets, many of them multiple times. On the surface, it looks like an attempt to prop up journalism in an era of collapsing ad revenue.

From a whistleblower's point of view, it looks very different.

Because when you bring evidence of State wrongdoing — administrative abuse, regulatory failure, institutional cover-ups — these are not “local democracy” stories. They don't sit neatly inside council chambers or court lists. They challenge the State itself. And those are precisely the stories that do not fit the funding categories.

That's not an accident. It's design.

Whistleblowing journalism is adversarial by nature. It follows paper trails, exposes systems, and names uncomfortable truths. It is slow, risky, legally fraught and politically inconvenient. It does not produce easy metrics or tidy outputs. And under Ireland's current funding model, it is effectively unsupported.

No editor needs to be told not to run these stories. The incentive structure does the work. Funding is discretionary and renewable. Outlets quickly learn what is safe to pursue — and what quietly leads nowhere. The result isn't censorship. It's something far more effective: omission.

From the inside, this is how it feels. You watch media organisations accept public funding from the very State bodies you're asking them to investigate. You hear assurances about editorial independence, even as your emails go unanswered and your documents sit unread. You realise that the problem isn't disbelief. It's risk.

And why wouldn't it be? Many of the same media outlets now receiving State funds rely heavily on freelancers and contractors — often operating in legally precarious arrangements themselves. Expecting those organisations to aggressively investigate State failures in employment law enforcement is unrealistic. It's a conflict built into the system.

This isn't about accusing journalists of bad faith. Most are doing their best inside a narrowing space. But structural dependence changes behaviour. It always has. A press that relies on the State to stay afloat will inevitably hesitate before biting the hand that feeds it — even if no one ever explicitly asks them to.

That's why whistleblowers don't trust a State-funded press.

We don't expect cheerleaders. We expect scrutiny. And when journalism is steered — even gently — away from investigating the State itself, the people with the most to lose are those trying to expose wrongdoing from the inside.

Public funding for journalism can strengthen democracy. But only if it is designed to protect adversarial reporting, not sideline it. Only if it recognises that the most important stories are often the least comfortable for those in power.

Until then, whistleblowers will continue to learn the hard way that some stories aren't "under-reported" by accident.

They're structurally unwelcome.