

The StubHub Customers Who Battled for Tickets—and Battle Harder for a Refund

The company brought legitimacy to a business once dominated by scalpers. Now it's facing complaints of lengthy fights to get money back; stranded outside a World Cup game.



Lori Knight paid for first-row tickets to a George Strait concert at Clemson University on StubHub. The tickets she received were for a section that appears nowhere in the stadium's map. ANNA OTTUM FOR WSJ

By Hanna Krueger
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Quick Summary

- StubHub is facing a flood of complaints and a proposed class-action lawsuit from buyers who experienced ticketing failures and delayed refunds.

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Three hours before the U.S. played Paraguay in the World Cup in June, Ricky Zaragoza was standing outside SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Calif., with his father and no tickets. He had waited

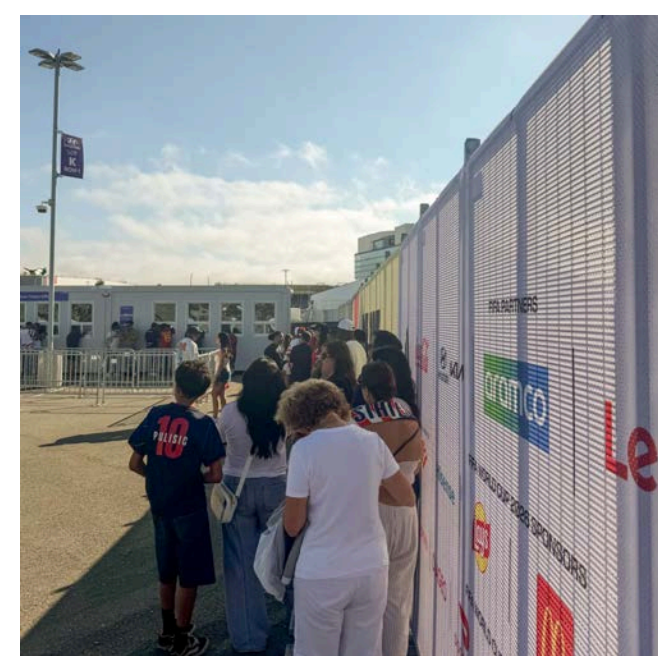
for this day since March 2025, when he paid \$2,162.90 for a pair of seats as a birthday gift for his dad.

Four days earlier, Zaragoza had called online ticketing platform StubHub to say his tickets still weren't in the FIFA app. The company promised replacements by noon the next day.

An anxious Zaragoza spoke with StubHub at least 10 times in calls that spanned nearly three hours in the days leading up to the game. Each time, he said, he was told not to worry.

At kickoff, Zaragoza was still without tickets. He approached the stadium's guest-services window.

"You're here because of StubHub, aren't you?" he recalled a stadium employee saying. She gestured at a crowd of at least 40 people: "You're not the only one. All these people are here because of StubHub."



Before a World Cup soccer match at SoFi Stadium in June, a line at the guest-services window was filled with StubHub buyers who couldn't get in, according to buyer Ricky Zaragoza. RICKY ZARAGOZA

StubHub, which connects buyers with ticket resellers, is facing a flood of complaints from World Cup fans who bought tickets months in advance, only to be stranded hours before the games. Burned buyers have swarmed Reddit threads and Facebook groups to vent and seek advice.

A proposed class-action suit was filed in federal court in Manhattan alleging that StubHub sold hundreds of World Cup resale tickets it was neither authorized nor able to deliver. StubHub has blamed World Cup disruptions on what it said were obstacles with FIFA's mobile-ticket app.

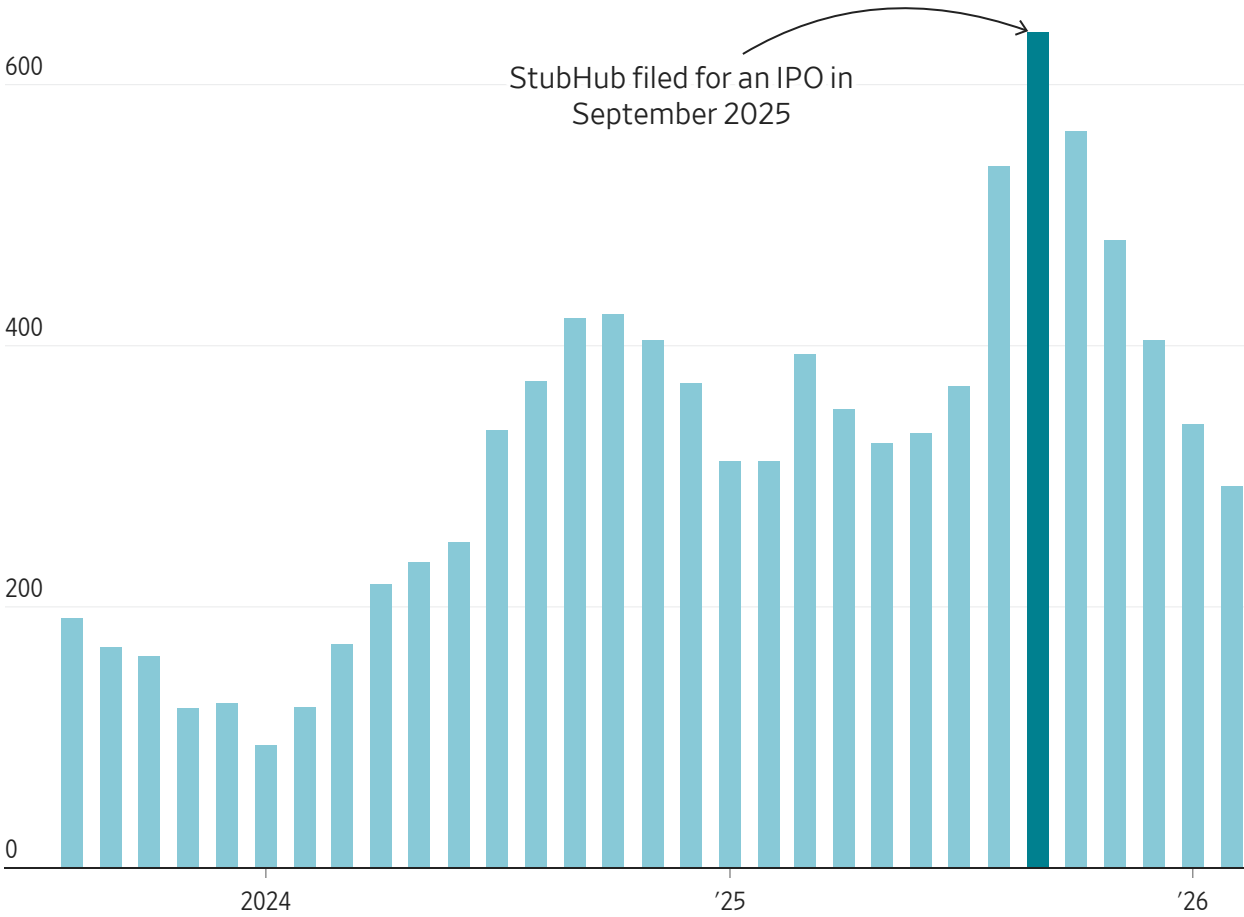
StubHub says it holds roughly half of the North American secondary ticket market, which it valued at \$18 billion in its IPO prospectus. The company went

public last fall at a more than \$8 billion valuation.

The Wall Street Journal found dozens of examples of ticketing failures involving all kinds of events—a Knicks game, a “Hamilton” performance, a George Strait concert and a Bill Gates book talk. More than 50 StubHub buyers said in interviews they were denied entry despite paying for valid tickets, were sent replacements worse than what they had bought, or spent months fighting StubHub for refunds it had already promised. For many, resolution came only after they hired lawyers or complained in the press.

Complaints about StubHub to the Better Business Bureau rose 47% from 2024 to 2025, and climbed 63% in the eight months leading up to the company’s September 2025 initial public offering. They peaked that September, the month StubHub listed, at 640—the highest monthly total in BBB’s records.

StubHub-related complaints to the Better Business Bureau, monthly



Note: The BBB displays only 1 in 5 complaints on their website.
Source: Better Business Bureau

Over the past three years, StubHub has drawn 11,338 BBB complaints. Its BBB profile cites a “significant spike in complaints” since the start of 2024 and refund requests “extensively delayed by the company.”

“StubHub was founded to make it easier and safer to buy tickets,” said Raj Beri, StubHub’s chief business officer. “We understand that missing an event isn’t just a bad user experience, it’s deeply disappointing on an emotional level. It’s also bad business, because our marketplace only works when fans attend an event.”

A StubHub spokesperson said about 1% of orders result in a refund. “The vast majority of refunds are processed within a week, and when issues arise it is often because a buyer’s payment information needs to be updated,” the spokesperson said.

Fraudulent tickets are always a risk in the resale market. Sellers renege when prices rise and the penalty costs less than the profit. The same seat is sold twice. Nontransferable passes—festival wristbands, corporate seats, badges issued in someone else’s name—are listed anyway.

Another problem is so-called speculative ticketing, a practice that works like a short sale, with the seller betting they can acquire the ticket before the event at a price that still turns a profit. The practice is prohibited by terms of service at major resale platforms, including StubHub, but still occurs across much of the industry, said Brandon Ross, a media and technology analyst at LightShed Partners.

StubHub doesn’t itself sell tickets. It connects buyers and sellers, taking a cut from each. When buyers purchase tickets, their money goes to StubHub right away, but sellers don’t get paid until after the event. StubHub never has possession of those tickets.

When a seller doesn’t deliver, StubHub says it will try to find replacement seats, but for high-profile events, last-minute replacements rarely exist. Fans are entitled then to a refund, but many are discovering that getting one can take weeks to months.

Increasingly, according to more than a dozen current and former StubHub employees interviewed by the Journal, the company’s customer-support operations don’t have enough resources to clean up the fallout when something goes wrong.

StubHub’s spending on operations and support declined from \$72.9 million in 2022 to \$63.2 million in 2025. Revenue over the same period rose 68%, to \$1.75 billion. In 2025 alone, the company spent \$971.7 million on sales and marketing—56% of its revenue for the year and more than 15 times what it spent on operations and support. A spokesperson for StubHub said the operations and support budget doesn’t include some expenses related to fraud protection, technology and engineering.

Some customers who were initially denied refunds told the Journal that when they tried to contest the decisions through the company’s only sanctioned avenue for legal disputes—private arbitration—they hit a wall. StubHub changed its designated mailing address for initiating arbitration at least seven times between January 2025 and July 2026, according to those customers, who said their certified mail bounced back as undelivered.

‘100% confidence’

Eric Baker and Jeff Fluhr founded StubHub in 2000 on a simple premise: buying secondhand tickets shouldn’t feel like a back-alley shakedown. They reassured buyers with a FanProtect

Guarantee promising “100% confidence.” The brand became a go-to vendor for last-minute seats to Beyoncé, Broadway and the baseball playoffs.



StubHub CEO Eric Baker co-founded the company in 2000. ALEKSEY KONDRATYEV FOR WSJ

“StubHub legitimized a business that had historically been run by bad actors,” said Randy Nichols, an artist manager and music-industry consultant. “And they’re losing that legitimacy now as they scale up and sacrifice the customer along the way.”

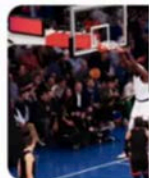
Baker left StubHub in 2004 and built a rival, Viagogo, in Europe. An Australian court penalized that company for false advertising. In Britain, regulators said buyers were struggling to get their money back under Viagogo’s guarantee, and a court ordered Viagogo to overhaul its business practices. Viagogo says it now complies with local law in both countries. Baker bought back StubHub in 2020 and now runs both brands as chief executive.

In 2024, StubHub shuttered the customer-service campus it had opened to fanfare seven years earlier in Draper, Utah, cutting 297 jobs, according to a state layoff notice. Operations shifted to Atlanta. By the end of last year, the company employed about 360 full-time customer-service workers for a marketplace that moved \$9.2 billion in ticket sales, according to company filings. The StubHub spokesperson said the company believed Atlanta offered a superior workforce and cheaper office real estate.

Former employees described the Atlanta customer-service operation as stretched thin. Internal software was fragmented and fragile, leaving agents without visibility into basic information such as whether a ticket had been delivered or if the company’s artificial-intelligence-powered chatbot had already promised a customer a refund, the former employees said. Disputes that should have taken days stretched to months.

After paying \$8,568 for two floor-level Knicks seats at Madison Square Garden in January, Michael Schwartz instead received tickets to a comedy show called “No Hard Feelings.” The name, he said, “just felt like an additional ‘screw you.’”

Schwartz said a StubHub representative told him he would be getting a refund. For three months, he said, he called StubHub every three days to inquire about the status of his refund, and each time the representative would make him rehash the details of his experience.



Brooklyn Nets at New York Knicks

Wed, Jan 21 • 7:30 PM
Madison Square Garden
New York, New York, USA

2 Section: VIP 11, Row: AA

Order Number	633943498
Section	VIP 11
Row	AA
Seats	17 - 18
Delivery	Mobile Tickets
Quantity	\$3,538.14 × 2
Fees	\$1,491.52
Total Price	\$8,567.80

i As soon as your refund is processed we will contact you by email. Due to the unprecedented number of cancelled and postponed events worldwide, and the continuously evolving impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on the global live events industry, it could take up to several months to process your refund.

Sell Your Ticket

Need further assistance?

Gary Owen: No Hard Feelings Tour

Sun, Feb 01, 2026, 7:30 PM . Linda Ronstadt Music Hall

Standard Ticket

SEC
UBALC

ROW
R

SEAT
242



Screenshots won't get you in.

BALC

Michael Schwartz was irate when he received tickets to a comedy show instead of the floor-level Knicks tickets he purchased.

In the StubHub app, a note was attached to his order: “Due to the unprecedented number of cancelled and postponed events worldwide, and the continuously evolving impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on the global live events industry, it could take up to several months to process your refund.” The Knicks game took place years after the public-health state of emergency had ended in New York state.

Schwartz filed for relief in arbitration, where StubHub eventually settled. StubHub said it can’t comment on any disputes in arbitration.

Speculative ticketing

A small number of high-volume sellers dominate ticket resale. In 2019, when the U.K.’s Competition and Markets Authority reviewed StubHub’s and Viagogo’s British transaction data, it found the 200 largest resellers generated roughly half of all sales by value—out of a pool of 40,000 to 75,000 active resellers on each platform.

The CMA also identified a form of selling in the secondary ticket market in which sellers advertise tickets they don’t yet own and buy comparable ones from the primary market only after a buyer has paid.

The practice is known as speculative ticketing. If the bet works, the seller pockets the difference. If it doesn't, the seller might renege, leaving the buyer scrambling. Penalties for sellers who fail to deliver "pale in comparison" to the markups they collect, said Ross, the LightShed Partners analyst.

StubHub's seller policies prohibit the practice, but the listings are easy to find. Tickets to the 2027 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival were available on StubHub in July, though festival organizers hadn't yet listed sale prices.

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival - Weekend 1 (April 22-25, 2027)

Thu, Apr 22 • TBA

New Orleans Fairgrounds and Racetrack, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

2 tickets ▾

General Admission

Access to Event grounds

\$936

incl. fees

Continue

General Admission +

Access to the GA+ Lounge and re-entry privileges

\$1,641

incl. fees

Continue

Krewé of Jazz Fest VIP

Access to event grounds with VIP amenities

\$2,837

incl. fees

Continue

Grand Marshal VIP

Only 8 left

\$4,316

incl. fees

Continue

Big Chief VIP

Only 8 left

\$4,777

incl. fees

Continue

Jazz Fest Cabanas

Access to Private Suites

Sold out

FanProtect™

We back every order so you can buy and sell tickets with 100% confidence.

Resell Anytime

No sure if you can make it to this event? No worries! You can [resell your tickets on StubHub](#) at any time.

Tickets to the 2027 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival were available on StubHub in July, though festival organizers haven't yet listed sale prices.

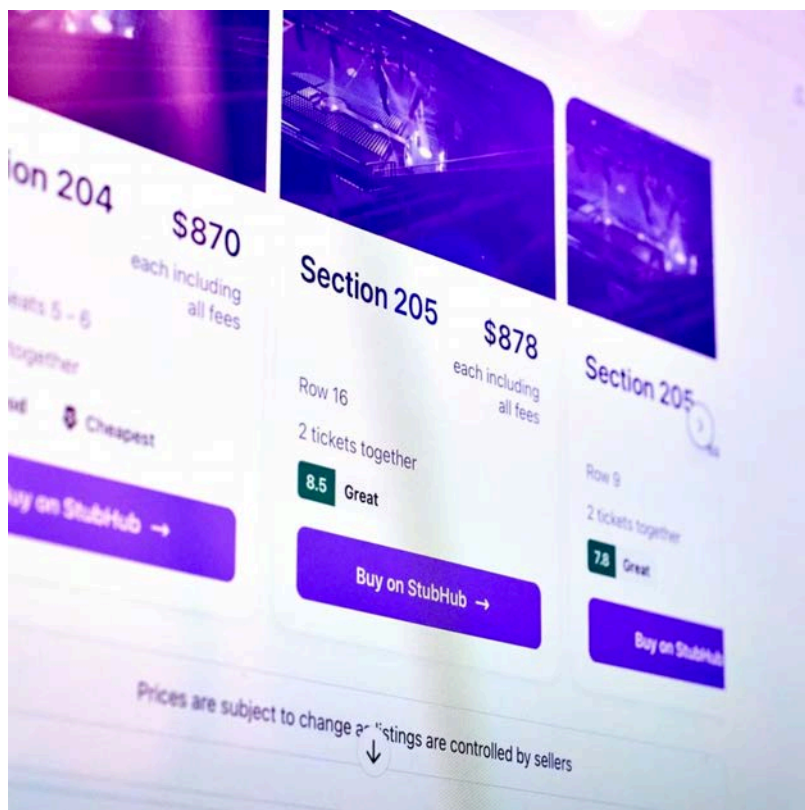
StubHub said tickets can legitimately enter the secondary market early through presales or authorized partner allocations. Asked on StubHub's first earnings call as a public company how it manages speculative ticketing, and whether investors should be paying attention to it, Baker said guaranteeing that fans get authentic tickets "is our business. That's what we do." He added: "So, for us, it's business as usual and nothing to talk about there."

Former employees said that rather than investigate a potentially fraudulent or undeliverable ticket when a customer raised concerns days before an event, managers instructed agents to tell customers to wait. During the World Cup, multiple buyers described StubHub representatives repeatedly urging them to the stadium without tickets.

The StubHub spokesperson said primary ticketing companies “only provide tickets to fans just before events,” which “creates this friction on resale marketplaces.”

When a seller cannot—or chooses not to—deliver, customer support tells buyers they are covered by the FanProtect Guarantee, which promises the company will “do our best” to find “comparable or better” replacement seats. The written guarantee also allows the company to decide whether to provide replacement tickets, issue a refund or offer a credit. What constitutes “comparable or better,” the policy states, is determined by StubHub “in its sole discretion based on cost, quality, availability and other factors.”

The wrinkle that angers buyers is that by event time, comparable replacement tickets on StubHub can cost significantly more than the customer originally paid. Two former senior StubHub employees said the company’s internal budget for replacements was reduced in early 2025, as the company prepared to go public and wanted the financials to look better.



StubHub was founded on a simple premise: Buying secondhand tickets shouldn’t feel like a back-alley shakedown. GABBY JONES/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Some customers are irked by replacement tickets StubHub offers. The company provided Reggie Jean-Brice with what it called a “complimentary upgrade” after his \$12,500 field-level tickets for a World Cup semifinal match between France and Spain weren’t available. The new tickets were in the fifth row of the stadium’s top tier.

When he called to object, he said, agents congratulated him on his upgrade. He heard the same script on every call over the next two weeks. One agent eventually told him the guarantee didn’t promise the same experience—only a ticket comparable in price.

Jean-Brice transferred the tickets back and requested a refund. The promised refund decision slid from 48 hours to 72 hours, then to five-to-eight days. After a dozen calls, Jean-Brice finally received a refund, two weeks after requesting it.

“Our goal is to get every fan into their event, every time, and if something goes wrong, we always want to find them replacement tickets,” said Beri, the chief business officer. “At its core, the FanProtect Guarantee is a backstop that ensures fans get their money back if all else fails. We

know that’s not a substitute for experiencing an event...We never want to give a refund, and no fan wants to receive one.”

Change of address



Lori Knight spent \$1,500 on George Strait tickets for her and her husband. Their tickets failed to scan at each gate they tried.

Lori Knight bought first-row tickets to a George Strait concert in Clemson University’s football stadium because her husband had just had foot surgery and couldn’t climb stairs easily. They spent \$1,500 for two seats StubHub described as Section X, Row 1. The tickets they received were for Section TS, which appears nowhere on the stadium’s official map for the concert.

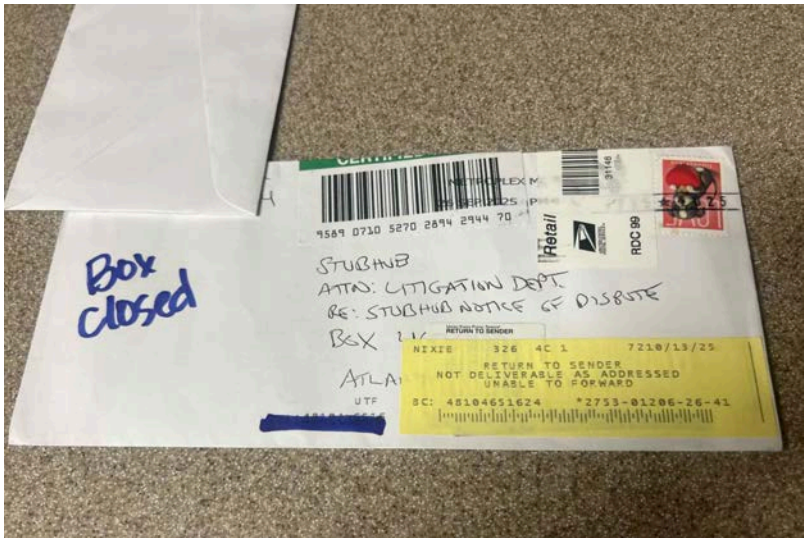
The couple went from gate to gate, Knight said, asking ushers and staff where the new section was. No one could tell them. Their tickets failed to scan each time they tried. Eventually, an employee at the main ticketing booth said the section didn’t exist. The couple left the stadium to listen to the concert from the parking lot and dance next to their car.

When Knight disputed the charge, StubHub told her the tickets she had received were valid and declined to issue a refund. The company said by email it had identified her account as “fraudulently claiming” she was denied entry, and warned that in cases where it identifies illegal activity, it will “be pursuing all legal remedies (criminal and civil) to the fullest extent of the law.”

StubHub’s terms of service require disputes to be resolved through private arbitration, not the courts. The company has changed its designated mailing address for customers to send a “notice of dispute” at least seven times since January 2025.

For years, it was a post office box in Draper, Utah. After StubHub moved its operations to Georgia, the destination shifted to an Atlanta post office box—but records reviewed by the Journal showed

that some customers’ certified mail came back stamped “Vacant.” The address then shifted to a box in a suburban Atlanta shopping plaza, but other customers’ mail was returned.



A letter of dispute mailed by a StubHub customer that was sent back as ‘undeliverable.’

In August 2025, a StubHub customer-care specialist directed one customer to mail legal notices to the company’s Atlanta office—but the notices came back marked “Attempted—Not Known.” By late 2025, StubHub changed the address again, this time using its old Draper post office box number with an Atlanta ZIP Code.

The company then listed a private mailbox center. Consumer attorney Bradford Clements, who represents Schwartz, Knight and hundreds of other StubHub customers in disputes with the company, said the address wasn’t recognized by standard routing software and mail carriers had to manually strip off part of the private box number to process the envelopes, only for the letters to be returned anyway.

StubHub declined to comment on the changes in address.

StubHub’s user agreement grants the company the right to serve legal notices by email but requires customers to send theirs by certified mail. When Clements, the lawyer, attempted to email dispute notices to StubHub’s outside counsel, that law firm said that email didn’t count. His clients, it said, still had to mail them.

Clements said he has taken on 264 clients who alleged StubHub owed them a collective total of \$3.8 million. More than 200 of them, he said, have since been paid—over \$2.1 million in all.

Hanna Krueger is a New York-based retail reporter for The Wall Street Journal who writes features and investigations on powerful figures, embattled companies and curious phenomena. Before joining the Journal in 2026, Hanna worked at the Boston Globe, where she served for two years on the Spotlight investigative team. In 2025, her coverage of Steward Healthcare was a finalist for...



