

HB 2486 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 5/6

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires, on or after October 1, 2021, officials of public bodies to grant news media representatives access to scenes of emergencies or emergency police activity that are otherwise closed to public. Provides exceptions when access may be denied. Directs Department of State Police to develop guidelines for press credentialing, when circumstances warrant denial of access, when news media representatives may be required to use personal protective equipment, and for conducting safety briefings. Requires department to consult with local law enforcement and fire department personnel, representatives of local governing bodies, and representatives of news media organizations in developing guidelines. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Replaces the measure. Requires officials of public bodies, as of January 1, 2022, to grant credentialed or documented representatives of news media organizations access to scenes of wildfires or natural disasters that are otherwise closed to public. Allows onsite scene commander or designated public information officer to deny access or or allow access without escort. Requires Department of State Police to convene committee of media and public safety agency stakeholders in equal numbers to develop voluntary guidelines for press credentials and documentation and examples of circumstances related to denial of access, personal protective equipment use, and safety briefings. Requires department to consult with local law enforcement and fire department personnel, local governing bodies, and representatives of new media organizations in developing guidelines. Requires committee report to Legislative Assembly by February 1, 2022. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

BACKGROUND:

Oregon currently has a “first informer broadcaster” statute that permits employees of designated broadcasters to access emergency areas for “the purposes of maintaining transmitters, generators or other essential equipment at a broadcast station or facility used to acquire, produce or transmit news or public safety information related to the emergency.” This statute is proposed to be revised by Senate Bill 107 (2021), which would allow the Office of Emergency Management to establish programs, or authorize certain private entities to establish programs, to credential individuals as critical service providers.

California law allows law enforcement to close areas because of disasters such as storms, fires, and earthquakes and make violation a misdemeanor, but it exempts “duly authorized representative[s] of any news service, newspaper, or radio or television station or network.” Media access to natural disasters or wildfires varies in other western states.

House Bill 2486 requires officials of public bodies to grant news media representatives access to scenes of emergencies or emergency police activity that are otherwise closed to public.