



## Testimony in Support of HB2486

Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee:

The Society of Professional Journalists' members are working journalists at media outlets of all sizes and mediums – print, web-only, and broadcast – throughout the state. SPJ brought HB2486 forward to address what has been a perennial pain point for all involved: A lack of consistent approaches to allowing media access (or not) to emergency sites such as wildfires.

This is a process bill. It directs the Oregon State Police to convene media and public safety stakeholders for the purpose of developing voluntary media access guidelines, with some sideboards.

Through productive discussions with public safety stakeholders earlier in this Session, SPJ developed the Dash-1 amendment, which narrows the scope of these guidelines to access to wildfire and natural disaster sites. These types of incidents tend to be of broad public interest, and offer a good starting point for guidelines.

In addition to narrowing the scope to wildfires and natural disasters, the Dash-1 does a few more things:

- Clarifies that public safety officers on site have authority to bar entry, and that escorts and PPE do not need to be provided by public safety agencies.
- Makes clearer that the output is a set of voluntary guidelines, and we are not asking the public safety-media committee convened under the bill to exhaustively detail every possible scenario.
- Makes clear that no agency is required to maintain a media credentialing program or list, but media representatives may be required to present press credentials or other documentation at a site in order to gain entry.
- Provides for a report back to the Legislature by February by the committee itself.
- Makes clear that media representatives who are granted access to a site may enter at their own risk and without promise of rescue.
- Changes the effective date, so the e-clause gets the process started, but the implementation is Jan. 1, 2022. In other words, the committee gets created and does its work in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2021.

The output of this will be voluntary guidelines to be broadly disseminated among public safety agencies and the working media.

Our hope is that this process will build greater understanding on all sides and provide a useful tool to onsite commanders and working media alike. We urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Holt  
for the Society of Professional Journalists, Oregon Pro Chapter