

Date: Feb. 9, 2023

To: House Committee on Rules

From: Scotta Callister

Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and members of the committee:

My name is Scotta Callister, and I live in Grant County, Oregon. I am co-owner of two news publications, the Malheur Enterprise based in Vale and Keizertimes in Keizer. I also am former editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle in John Day and serve on the board of the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism.

In more than 30 years of community journalism, I've seen firsthand the way a trusted news source benefits a community. Given facts, people will participate, will get informed, will vote – and their communities are healthier as a result. Today, with the flood of speculative and false information online, credible news sources are more important than ever to our communities, and to our democratic institutions.

Rural news publishers have faced the same kinds of market shifts and disappearing revenue that challenge big urban operations. But they also face obstacles due to remoteness and isolation, both professional and geographical. They struggle to keep up with changing technology in areas where internet service is wobbly, technical support is slim, and the workforce is both shrinking and hard to attract. There's no question that the future of journalism is digital, but many of our rural news operations are falling behind in making that transition – not because they resist change but because they may be simply too stretched and lacking in expertise to do it.

Meanwhile, the problems these publishers face are very individual. One needs training for staffers to produce solid civic journalism. Another wants to chart a course to becoming nonprofit. Another needs to upgrade an outdated website. Another lacks audience engagement tools to fit the local market. There is no one-size-fits-all solution; a tailored approach is essential.

I believe the Journalism Resource Center envisioned by HB 2605, through the partnership of FORJ and the Agora Journalism Center at UO, could be our best hope to address such varied needs and keep fact-based, trusted journalism alive in rural Oregon. We need these publishers to continue informing their communities, whether in print or online, and to continue telling the story of rural Oregon. If we can do that, the beneficiaries will be not just the communities they serve – but the state as a whole.

I urge you to support and fully fund HB 2605.