

Date: February 9, 2023
To: House Committee on Rules
From: Andrew DeVigal, Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon
Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

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

My name is Andrew DeVigal, and I direct the [Agora Journalism Center](#) at the University of Oregon, where we believe democracy and journalism are inextricably linked.

With 30 years of experience as a journalist, I've seen firsthand the slow collapse of local news that has been well documented. The loss of trusted news sources should be troubling as information gaps are where misinformation breeds, and accountability goes to die.

But I also see hope with examples of innovative local news and civic media outlets directly supporting their community's civic health. For instance, KPCC in Southern California created a Help Desk to directly answer thousands of COVID-19 questions from existing and new audiences. News414, established by Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service and Wisconsin Watch collaborative, uses texting to connect Wisconsinites with resources and information. Non-profit news site Documented uses WhatsApp to serve immigrant communities. Closer to home, we've also facilitated a state-wide media collaborative project shaped by first listening to Oregon voters.

In these and many other models across the country, news organizations are going directly where people are—to intentionally listen, to fill those information gaps and earn the public's trust.

Our center was founded with the same ethos. Agora, meaning a gathering place, symbolizes the future of local news and civic health in Oregon. It is the 21st-century public square where Oregonians can share stories and information, identify problems, deliberate, and find solutions: together.

At the Agora Journalism Center, we've done the early groundwork in assessing our State's local news and information ecosystem with a [report](#) we published last fall. Through my UO courses, we've also conducted information needs assessments in La Pine and Hermiston communities. We're studying Rogue Valley this term. We created and maintain [Gather](#), a platform that supports community-minded journalists with resources and case studies. We've also hosted several conferences and workshops to better understand journalists' evolving role in a community's information health.

HB 2605 will allow us to convene a community-informed working group to further our understanding

of our State's information needs and assets. We will go to where Oregonians are and ask whose needs aren't being met or whose voices aren't being heard.

We'll listen to understand through virtual and in-person listening sessions and online/printed surveys to hear from especially hard-to-reach communities. These will be bookended with symposia where we'll convene industry experts, practitioners and local civic leaders to discuss the challenges and potential solutions. This leads to a comprehensive study with policy recommendations for further action by the State of Oregon.

Chairs and members of this committee, we have an opportunity to collectively address the urgent need across all 36 counties to protect local journalism, bolster the State's civic and communication infrastructures, and meet the evolving information needs of all Oregonians. Together we can protect democracy.

I urge your support for and fully fund HB 2605. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Andrew DeVigal

PROJECT VISION

