



Date: February 9, 2023

To: House Committee on Rules

From: Regina Lawrence, School of Journalism & Communication, University of Oregon

Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

Good afternoon Chair Fahey and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Regina Lawrence and I am here on behalf of the Agora Journalism Center at University of Oregon.

I am here today to support HB2605 because it will bolster our state's news and information infrastructure.

Over the last decade, research has accumulated that shows the connection between robust local journalism and a healthy democracy. That research shows that when local news declines, not only do communities become less informed, but voting rates decline, political polarization increases, and people feel less connected to their communities.

But today, despite its critical importance, local journalism is struggling mightily to survive.

Maybe if this were just a question of an industry that needs to figure out how to be profitable again, we wouldn't need to care. But journalism is more than just an industry. Quality local journalism is essential to our quality of life. Just like clean water and safe highways and good schools are necessary to a functioning society, quality local news is an essential part of the civic infrastructure of democracy.

Local news is also essential to how we can grapple with the serious issues we face in this state, from housing and homelessness to drug addiction and treatment to the environment and wildfires and drought. For any issue you care about, any problem that you want to solve here in Oregon, you should care about the quantity and the quality of local news that your constituents are receiving.

Last September, the Agora Journalism Center released a report mapping Oregon's remaining local news outlets. We found that nearly a quarter of Oregon counties are in danger of becoming permanent news deserts, and that because of shrinking resources, many outlets struggle to cover what's happening in their own communities.

To address this problem, two things are needed: Immediate investment that will help local newsrooms to survive and to innovate, and deep listening and research to identify the most effective ways to re-invigorate our local news infrastructure so that Oregonians can be more informed and engaged.

I urge your support for Protecting Local Journalism, and urge the measure be funded fully. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Regina Lawrence