

Submitter: Mark Garber
On Behalf Of: Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HB3167

Feb. 9, 2023

Chair Julie Fahey and members of the House Rules Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on House Bill 3167. I'm Mark Garber and I am vice chair and president emeritus for the Pamplin Media Group, which publishes 24 community newspapers in Oregon, both in print and online.

House Bill 3167 will modernize Oregon's public notices statutes to adapt to changes in how the public consumes information. It also is an important way for the Legislature to support local journalism throughout all of Oregon, and particularly in smaller communities.

This bill preserves the current practice of requiring an independent, verifiable means of notifying the public of significant government and legal actions, including such things as city council or school board hearings, foreclosures on properties, and probate notices. Newspapers have long been the medium for these notices, and we have the institutional knowledge and staffing in place to make sure notices are handled correctly – that they are published on time and in compliance with the law, that affidavits are provided, and that a record of a notice is kept for many years after publication. It is a serious job and we in the industry take it very seriously.

As you have heard in previous testimony, HB 3167 will allow long-established newspapers to publish these notices in digital-replica form, as well as in print, meaning that Oregonians would continue to see these notices in the format they've been accustomed to since 1850. This proposal was prompted by the situation in Medford, when a daily newspaper more than a century old, decided to go to digital-only publication. That newspaper has since made the decision to close altogether, and the void is quickly being filled by other newspaper companies. But the need to adapt to our readers' changing habits remains. Despite all the talk of declining newspaper readership, the truth is that we have more readers than ever before. It's just that many people now choose to read our content in digital form, rather than in print.

When it comes to public notices, Oregon newspapers recognized the digital trend more than two decades ago, which is why we made it a requirement of the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association that all member newspapers upload their public notices to ONPA's statewide public notice website. This is in addition to publishing notices in print, on individual newspaper websites, and, in our company's case, through email delivery to people who've indicated an interest in public notices. We think it is important to give the public every opportunity to see these notices, which is why we publish them across all of our platforms.

It's important, of course, that the public be informed and that all legal requirements are met, but I don't want to shy away from another reason we hope you will support

this bill: Public notices are a significant form of revenue for many, many newspapers, and especially for smaller newspapers that may be the only source of credible journalism for their communities. If these newspapers are not able to adapt to changing times without the continued fiscal support of public notices, we will have many more news deserts in Oregon. That would be a terrible outcome for our communities, which are made stronger by their newspapers. Community newspapers play a unique role. We cover local government, yes, but we also unify communities. We publish stories about people doing good deeds. We cover the high school sports teams. We tell our readers about new businesses that come to town, or about things they can do in their community this weekend. We partner with many nonprofit organizations to promote their worthy causes as well.

The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association believes HB 3167 can help community newspapers to continue fulfilling their mission across Oregon. Thank you again for your time today, and I'm happy to answer any questions.