



February 9, 2023

Dear Representatives,

My name is Seth Lewis, and I reside in Eugene, Oregon. I am a professor at the University of Oregon, where I serve as Director of Journalism (leading the undergraduate journalism program) and hold an endowed-chair faculty position as the Shirley Papé Chair in Emerging Media in the School of Journalism and Communication.

I care passionately about the state of journalism — both nationally and in our beloved state — because it has been a key part of my life for many years, and especially because I know, from my own research and that of many others in my scholarly field, how vital journalism is to the well-being of society and the proper functioning of democracy.

I grew up in Gresham as the second of nine children. Having gained a love for journalism from an early age, I started working as a reporter covering sports and news for *The Outlook* in east Multnomah County when I was a 16-year-old junior at Sam Barlow High School. During college and beyond, I went on to work for several other news organizations around the country, including as assistant sports editor at *The Miami Herald*. Later, I pursued a Ph.D. studying journalism and its role in society at the University of Texas at Austin, and since then I have been a professor of journalism and media — first at the University of Minnesota, and now at the University of Oregon since 2016.

I feel incredibly grateful to be “home” again in Oregon, contributing to the training of journalism students in this state. Our School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon is the only accredited journalism school in the Pacific Northwest, and we are widely recognized around the country as one of the foremost centers not only for teaching journalism as a craft but also for developing innovative approaches for journalism’s future. This includes pathbreaking work by the Agora Journalism Center as well as our other programs in “solutions journalism” and “engaged journalism” — all of these efforts focused on reimagining journalism to be more responsive to communities and their needs, to help journalists truly listen to their readers and attend to the issues they care about most. This is particularly true as we seek to refashion journalism to better address the pressing needs for quality information that exist in many smaller markets and rural areas in Oregon — places where the loss of news-related resources has been felt most acutely in recent years.

As you know, we face crises of trust, community, and democracy on multiple fronts. What’s important to recognize is that professionally reported, high-quality journalism has been shown in research, again and again over the decades, to be a key linchpin in civic health and wellbeing. When people have good local journalism at their disposal, they are more likely to vote, more likely to get involved in local organizations, more likely to care about their community and its future, and ultimately more likely to have the information they need to act as effective citizens. Additionally, research has shown many times that an absence of strong journalism in a community is connected to higher levels of corruption, malfeasance, and other abuses because there are no watchdogs to hold the powerful to account. And, at a time when we’re all more



actually aware of problems surrounding misinformation online as well as the broad crisis of trust in institutions and in each other as neighbors, we need more than ever locally focused journalism, rooted *in* communities and *for* communities, to revitalize our state and its people.

Because, presently, our state is headed in a dire direction. Newspapers are closing in our communities. Others, like the *Register-Guard* in Eugene, are experiencing existential cutbacks that have made them a shell of their former selves, ill-equipped to fulfill their basic civic functions and responsibilities. And social media, as you know, is no substitute; it simply will not and cannot fill the void in producing high-quality reporting about communities.

To be clear: This is not about trying to “save” newspapers; rather, it’s about trying to *grow* the quality and variety of local journalism that serves local needs in local communities.

Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605, offers an important step forward in attending to this challenge, and for this reason I urge that you support and fully fund this measure before you.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seth Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

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