



Date: February 9, 2023  
To: House Committee on Rules  
From: Jody Lawrence-Turner, The Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism  
Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

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

My name is Jody Lawrence-Turner, and I'm the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism's executive director.

My love of journalism was born here in this building. At the tender age of 3, my dad brought me to work while he covered politics for a radio station located on the bottom level of the capitol. Throughout my youth, I accompanied him to newsrooms all around the valley, where I'd wait as he tapped away on deadline. Not surprisingly, I followed in his footsteps.

My first journalism job was for two independently-owned rural newspapers where I worked as a copy editor. But one of the great things about rural news operations is the opportunity to do just about every job at the newspaper, including answering the phone or talking to community members who walked through the door. This job launched my long career in journalism and embedded an appreciation for its vital, trusted role in all communities.

Leading FORJ has offered me the opportunity to help preserve professional journalism in Oregon. To do this, our nonprofit uses innovative programming focused on addressing three core areas: recruiting new journalists, helping news publications find the resources to be sustainable and thrive, and facilitating collaborations and labs to expand content.

It's important to note that we're not an independent news organization, but rather a nonprofit founded to help sustain journalism.

The need for help in our industry is high everywhere, but particularly dire in rural Oregon. These publications are often the only consistent, reliable and unbiased medium documenting the experiences of the communities in which they operate. Losing these organizations results in news deserts that disenfranchise the diversity of voices in rural areas, drastically limits representation in the political process and society's ability to learn and evolve from these experiences. Rural news publications keep readers informed of public meeting agendas and decisions made by the school board, city councilors, and county commissioners. Without the

oversight of local professional journalists, local governments are free to operate without accountability to the public, and extremist groups are able to thrive in an environment of rumor, gossip, and innuendo. Without the platform offered by a local newspaper, many rural interest groups are left without a voice in public policy, which in turn exacerbates the urban/rural divide.

Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605 will fund a coalition that will provide immediate help to struggling news outlets by providing resources to help sustain journalism throughout Oregon, while also researching best practices to keep the momentum moving forward. The need is imminent, and we must act now to protect democracy. FORJ will be the advocate for news outlets throughout our state, we'll be the boots on the ground helping where the need is highest, and we'll work with coalition partners to create a system that sustains local news.

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

Sincerely,  
Jody Lawrence-Turner