

Submitter: Brad Fuqua
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Commerce and Consumer Protection
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3431

To the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection:

Thank you for providing an opportunity to submit testimony.

I established the Philomath News in November 2020 after the Corvallis Gazette-Times opted to close down the Philomath Express. I was the editor of that print publication during its entire run except for the final issue (January 2015-September 2020) and during that time, I learned how important local news is to Philomath. I knew that a digital news site would be welcomed and supported. As a result, I work very hard to keep the news flowing to this community.

I do not have a paywall — it was important to me that I keep the news site free for anyone to read from retired folks on fixed incomes to high school students who want to read what I wrote about them out of last night's basketball game.

I accept what I call voluntary memberships at three different contribution levels. As of today (Feb. 5), I have 275 members, which you could equate to subscriptions. In addition, I have 825 subscribers to a newsletter that I send out with the latest headlines five times per week and according to Mailchimp standards, it has an exceptional open rate. And I also have nearly 3,100 followers on Facebook. PhilomathNews.com page views typically fall within the range of 135,000 to 200,000 per month.

I'm telling you all of this because I have a lot of local eyes on Philomath News. And when I publish a public notice, it receives attention.

My public notices appear on the home page ("above the fold" to use print publication language) at the top of the sidebar section in a "click to enlarge format." People click on the public notice to read it in full. I maintain an archives section with all public notices that have been published. And I track page views, hovers and clicks on the public notices and submit analytics to the city of Philomath (or other client) to be able to see how much traffic it received. Public notices are also posted to the Philomath News Facebook page, which as I mentioned, has nearly 3,100 followers. In other words, the public notice receives a lot of exposure.

The rate charged for the public notice is based on an equation I came up with to convert column inches (the traditional measurement used in print ads) to pixels. I place those ad sizes into a chart that is connected to a rate. The rates are based on the average ad rates that I charge to traditional advertisers. There is no inflated rate just because I'm dealing with a city government that has to legally publish such notices. In fact, I give nonprofits, schools and governmental entities a 15% discount. I have no hard feelings toward the print newspaper industry. My transition to digital news has not been easy. I'm a man of a certain age who grew up in the business — I loved feeling the vibration in the newsroom when the press started up late at night; I

enjoyed the smell of the ink and even the archives room ("the morgue") where past editions were stored; and I enjoyed holding a newspaper physically in my hands. But as I've had to learn, those days are over. The world has changed and will continue to change when it comes to news delivery.

I believe legacy newspapers need to change with the times and rework revenue streams while steering away from financial self-interest and ignoring public benefit. Many have not been able to do this and selfishly hang on to things like revenue from public notices. For me, it's not about the money. To be honest, I would survive just fine without the money that comes in through public notices — it's a drop in the bucket. The financial piece of this should be secondary and not dictate public policy decisions that are intended to strengthen transparency.

Please consider moving this effort forward to clean up legal language that leaves no doubt that digital-only news publications can legally publish public notices.

Brad Fuqua, Editor/Publisher, Philomath News