

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

Dear House Commerce and Consumer Protection committee;  
I am writing today to share the critical role that newspapers like Columbia Gorge News play in preserving local democracy and supporting our communities. I am the owner and publisher of Columbia Gorge News, a regional news publication that serves Hood River and The Dalles in Oregon, as well as Bingen and White Salmon in Washington. In 2020, when three century-old newspapers in our area were closed by their former owners, whom I worked for over 25 years, I made the decision to purchase these publications to prevent a news desert from forming in our region. Our publication continues the long-standing tradition of providing reliable local news, which became even more important in the wake of those closures.

Operating a local newspaper is no easy task, especially given the increased challenges of inflation and the ongoing struggles to recover advertising revenue to pre-pandemic levels. The cost of printing, distribution, and production continues to rise at double-digit rates, and without public notices, we would face the very real risk of having to close our doors.

Public notices have been an essential backbone of newspapers providing reporting leads. These notices are not just an advertising service; they are a public service. They ensure transparency in local government, informing our community about important actions taken by local entities, from city councils to school boards. We take great care in preparing these notices, including reviewing the content for accuracy, ensuring notarized affidavits, and archiving them digitally on the state's legal notice website. Our readers rely on this transparency and consistency, knowing they can access public notices in the print edition of our paper or on our website in a centralized, permanent archive.

Despite the clear value of public notices, the cost of preparing them is higher than any other form of advertising due to the thorough review process and additional administrative work involved. Public notices require a level of diligence that protects the integrity of the information, ensuring it does not disappear into the void of random websites. They are historically archived and available for future reference, whether in print or online.

While some may argue that newspapers should go entirely digital to save costs, we must recognize that there is a significant population of our readers who rely on the print edition. Our subscribers read it weekly, and if a delivery is missed, they make

sure we know about it. Going fully digital would alienate a portion of our readership and further jeopardize our ability to serve the community.

We receive great support from our readers, and I'd like to share a letter we received just this week, which reflects how deeply our community values the work we do:  
Praise for news: "Kudos to the Columbia Gorge News team for their excellent reporting and coverage of the regional news. There is a comfort for me to sit by the fire in my easy chair and read the newspaper instead of dialing up and reading a computer. Your coverage of the news has been refreshing these last few years. Keep it up!"

At Columbia Gorge News, we remain committed to our mission of informing the public with accurate and timely news. But we cannot continue to do so without the revenue from public notices. We urge you to recognize the value of public notices in local newspapers and consider their importance in maintaining transparency and democracy within our communities.

I oppose HB 3431.

Sincerely,  
Chelsea Marr  
Owner and Publisher, Columbia Gorge News