

House Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

February 7, 2025

Christopher McMorran
PO Box 400
980 Applegate St.
Philomath, OR 97370

Chair Sosa, Vice Chairs Chaichi and Osborne, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Christopher McMorran – and although many of you may know me from my job on the other side of the building, I come before you today wearing my Mayor hat.

I am incredibly honored to serve as the Mayor of Philomath – my hometown. The City of Philomath is in strong support of HB 3431.

Philomath is a small timber town nestled at the foot of the Coast Range, and, like many small or rural towns across the state, Philomath has no locally-published print newspaper. However, we are incredibly fortunate to have a robust daily digital news publication called the Philomath News. The Philomath News is a privately owned and operated business which publishes stories on local events, local government, school sports, and other hyper-local content. Their website, which has no paywall, receives tens of thousands of hits every month. In fact, in the last month of 2024, their website had over 142,000 views from nearly 100,000 visitors.

They also send out a digital newsletter to over 4,000 people every day – and for context, the population of Philomath is only 5,800.

I say all of this to illustrate that the Philomath News is far and away the best place to disseminate information to our residents.

However, the way the law is currently written, the City of Philomath is forced to publish public notices in the Corvallis Gazette-Times/Albany Democrat-Herald. These newspapers are written and published in a different county, and are owned by an out-of-state national newspaper conglomerate. They no longer even offer daily delivery in Philomath. In fact, they barely cover Philomath. In a recent article listing towns in Benton County, they forgot to even mention Philomath. Yet, under the current law, the legislature has told us this is the best place for us to publish public notices of land use hearings, budget meetings, and other critical opportunities for Philomath residents to engage in the local democratic process.

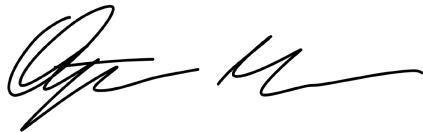
While the legislature amended the law in 2023 to allow public notices in digital news publications, the language of the current law is overly restrictive and outdated. It essentially says that only digital newspapers which are formatted exactly like physical newspapers are eligible. Online-only publications do not format their news this way, and as a result, the law still largely restricts publications to printed newspapers.

As such, the City of Philomath, as well as the Philomath School District, are forced to publish notices both in these out-of-town publications, as well as in the Philomath News. We are caught between the letter of the law – which can read that we must publish in these out-of-town newspapers – and the spirit of the law – that we should notify our residents through the best possible means, including digital news publications.

On behalf of my hometown and many other small and rural communities across the state, I urge your support of this bill. If you have concerns or questions, let us know. We are happy to work with you to find the right solution. But I hope we can agree to support our residents engaging in the democratic process, and I hope we can agree to support local journalism – whether or not that comes in the form of a newspaper.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and I believe we also have the City of Philomath's legal counsel available online for specific questions if you have them. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris McMorran', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher McMorran
Mayor, City of Philomath