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March 19, 2025

State of Oregon - Senate Rules Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Ashland.News Board of Directors' Unanimous Support for SB437 – Public Notice Modernization

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Senate Rules Committee,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Ashland.News, I am writing to formally express our unanimous support for SB437, a much-needed modernization of Oregon's public notice laws. Notably, this is the first time our board has taken a position on a legislative proposal, underscoring the importance of this issue to both our organization and the communities we serve.

Ashland.News is a nonprofit, independent digital news organization dedicated to providing accurate, reliable, and accessible news to our community. Like many local news providers across Oregon, we have witnessed a profound shift in how residents consume news and access public information.

Historically, Oregon law has required that public notices be published in print newspapers. While this may have been the best approach 50 years ago, today's local media landscape is entirely different:

- 68% of incorporated Oregon cities and several entire counties no longer have a local newspaper (Agora Journalism Center, University of Oregon). And while many of these communities are a newspaper desert, they are not a news desert, instead served by digital news sites, broadcasters, radio stations and an entire constellation of local news providers.
- Only 9% of Americans now prefer print newspapers for local news, while 48% prefer digital platforms (Pew Research, 2024).
- Print circulation is rapidly declining nationwide, with a 12.7% year-over-year drop in 2024 alone. Meanwhile, digital readership continues to grow. (Alliance for Audited Media, 2025).
- Even among newspaper readers, digital dominates:
 - In 2018, 54% of daily newspaper readers accessed them in print.
 - By 2024, only 31% read print newspapers, while 66% access them digitally.

In communities like Ashland and many others across Oregon, local governments are already adapting to this new reality by using digital platforms, broadcasters, and other sources beyond print

newspapers to disseminate critical public information. SB437 does not eliminate print notices—it simply provides local governments with the flexibility to choose the most effective means of communication based on what best serves their communities.

We recognize that many newspapers are struggling financially, and we share concerns about the challenges facing local journalism. However, public notice laws should not function as a government-mandated subsidy for one specific type of news organization. The intent of these laws is to ensure broad, effective public awareness—not to sustain legacy print media business models.

Opponents of SB437 may claim that:

- “Only print newspapers can archive public notices for the long term.” This is not accurate—digital publishers and broadcasters similarly have archiving capabilities.
- “Newspapers will go out of business if other publishers are allowed to carry public notices.” States like Florida have already modernized public notice laws without wiping out their newspaper industry.
- “Print newspapers remain the best way to reach the public.” In many Oregon communities, digital, television, or radio platforms already have larger audiences and deeper community engagement, making them just as effective platforms for broad public notice dissemination.

By passing SB437, Oregon will bring its public notice laws into alignment with modern news consumption habits while maintaining the transparency and accountability these laws were originally intended to provide. This bill:

- Expands access by allowing digital publishers and broadcasters to carry public notices.
- Reduces costs for local governments by fostering competition and flexibility in how public notices are published.
- Maintains government transparency by ensuring notices remain publicly available, searchable, and widely accessible.
- Does not eliminate print notices—it simply provides more choices for local governments to ensure notices are reaching their communities effectively.

For all these reasons, the Board of Directors of Ashland.News urges your support of SB437 and asks that you advance this critical legislation.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

David Sommers
Board Member, Ashland.News