

Submitter: Joe Moore
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB686

I'm a registered voter in Washington County, Oregon. I'm also a (long ago) graduate of the Radio-TV program at Arkansas State University.

I learned of SB 686 today, on Oregon Live, from a guest column by two folks who have done research on how to keep local journalism alive in these days of shrinking newspaper, radio, and tv newsrooms, and expanding online platforms. I see this same column was posted on the Rogue Valley Times website today.

I'm asking you to support SB686, to move it out of your committee to the full legislature, to pass it and have it become law. It seems to be a fix for a problem that has grown worse with our modern technology.

I was an announcer in college radio and a videographer at a TV station as a young adult. A friend tried to start an alternative weekly newspaper. Around that same time we watched the demise of the Arkansas Gazette, a statewide newspaper that had won awards for its coverage of the Little Rock desegregation crisis. I soon watched the failure of my friend's newspaper, as well as the failure of the alternative weekly he was trying to compete with. I had also worked at a Low Power TV station that went off the air after a year of struggle. More recently, I've seen the Oregonian reduce its print run from every day to just a couple days a week. I can no longer find a print copy of The Willamette Week out here in the suburbs.

So I understand that newsrooms struggling with money and cash flow is nothing new.

But Google, Meta, and their ilk ARE new. When I worked in broadcasting, newspapers were newspapers, radio was radio, television was television. The Internet was not a thing. Now everyone has websites, blogs, Substacks, they all produce video and audio as well as print. I can read OPB, The Oregonian, and KGW all on my phone. Newsrooms have always struggled, but the changes in technology have intensified and added new dimensions to that struggle.

These large platforms like Google vacuum up the content produced by our local journalists and spit it back out, apparently paying little or nothing for it.

SB686 would be a step in the right direction, to help these newsrooms better afford to get out and cover our local news, real news, news our local citizens need to learn about.

The provision that bases payments to a digital journalism provider on the number of journalists employed is a wise move. This will incentivize newsrooms to hire more reporters, which will encourage more young people to seek work in journalism. It will hopefully encourage these providers to do real, local reporting, and not focus on the old “if it bleeds it leads” mentality.

I’m also encouraged by the creation of the Oregon Civic Information Consortium. This will provide students from different schools, with different interests, some experience studying journalism. Even if someone doesn’t become a journalist, having a background in studying journalism can help a student become a more aware and more involved citizen.

I support SB686, and I encourage your committee, the entire legislature, and the Governor, to do the same.