

As a professor of practice in journalism at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication, I teach students the core skills of reporting and writing -- and the importance of local journalism to communities and democracies.

Journalism, I tell students, is a public good. Reporting helps to make communities work, whether that's holding public officials accountable, telling stories that help residents to know their neighbors or giving information during weather emergencies or other disasters. But journalism, I also tell students, is in trouble because the financial model that supported this important work has disintegrated.

As a resident of Springfield, Lane County, I live in a community that has fewer news outlets -- and, importantly, far fewer journalists working at those news outlets -- than it did when I moved in here 2014.

This makes communities less informed and less safe. When an ice storm left my neighborhood without power for more than a week in Winter 2024, it was difficult to get any information. That's because there were not enough reporters asking questions of public officials and utilities for the good of the community. Desperate for any information, I found myself scrolling Facebook and reactivating my long-dormant Nextdoor account. I could not find the information I needed. No one was reporting it. All I found were rumors and arguments and confusion.

So it is in both of those roles, as a journalism professor and as a concerned citizen, that I am writing to urge your support for SB 686.

The Oregon Journalism Protection Act would require large platforms like Facebook to fairly compensate Oregon news publishers for content that supports platform traffic, audience and profits. It would also establish a nonprofit organization to make grants to local publications and media markers -- important for every community, but especially rural communities, ethnic communities and others that have been traditionally underserved.

The citizens of our state need reliable, accurate, carefully reported news and information. SB 686 is an important part of making this happen.

Sincerely,
Lori Shontz