



April 9, 2025

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

As publishers of an independent community newspaper in Northeast Portland, we welcome legislation to improve Oregonians' access to quality news and information, and SB 686 is a much-needed step forward. It attempts to address two urgent needs for local news: hiring more journalists and building a stronger information ecosystem.

While the funding for hiring journalists is essential, we believe the latter portion deserves deeper consideration — and a larger slice of the funding.

As written, we feel this legislation does an excellent job answering the question: “How do we replace local journalists we’ve lost at legacy organizations?” But in our view, the more pressing question is: “How do we serve more Oregonians while encouraging news organizations to be more responsive to their needs?”

That’s why we’re especially excited by the second portion of this bill: the creation of the Civic Information Consortium to be housed at the University of Oregon. This model offers an opportunity to direct crucial resources to home-grown start-ups, hyperlocal publications and non-traditional sites that experiment with approaches that foster deep connection with diverse communities.

It’s these organizations — like our 40-year-old independent monthly in NE Portland — that serve Oregonians at the grassroots level. They are scrappy and nimble and must constantly innovate by both necessity and choice. They are deeply invested in and responsive to their audiences, who are most often underserved by traditional media. After all, no single news organization can truly serve an entire population. That’s why we believe it’s so important to holistically support the entire information ecosystem, comprising a variety of news organizations that collectively meet the needs of Oregonians.

As it stands, only 10% of the funds generated by this legislation would be set aside for these kinds of organizations. We feel that number should be higher as a reflection of the value of the diversity of local news organizations and the vital role they play.

We know that a robust local news ecosystem can transform communities by increasing civic engagement, combatting disinformation and creating a sense of shared mission and experience that creates durable and long-lasting benefits. We believe this bill aims for those very goals, and would support any amendments that would support *all* the organizations who share this mission.

We would be very happy to be part of the discussion as it moves forward, and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Todd and Lisa

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