



To: Senate Rules Committee
Re: Support of Senate Bill 686
Date: April 11th, 2025

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 686.

The University of Oregon is home to the School of Journalism and Communication and the Agora Journalism Center, both of which are dedicated to advancing the role of journalism in civic life. Our faculty and researchers study the rapidly changing information landscape and its effects on communities across Oregon and beyond. The evidence is clear: vibrant local news ecosystems are essential to the health of our democracy.

Robust local journalism is correlated with greater civic engagement, more informed voters, higher levels of community connection, and stronger government accountability. When local news disappears, so too does our ability to understand, participate in, and hold accountable the institutions that shape our lives. Research conducted at the University of Oregon has documented the disturbing erosion of local news across the state. Since 2022 alone, nearly 20 newspapers in Oregon have shut down or been consolidated, including long-standing institutions like the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Medford Mail Tribune*.

As newsrooms shrink or disappear altogether, many communities, especially rural and underserved ones, are left without reliable access to relevant local news. This leaves a vacuum too often filled by misinformation, disinformation, and AI-generated content that is untethered from facts and local accountability.

SB 686 takes a thoughtful and necessary approach to this urgent problem. It would require major technology companies to pay their fair share for the journalism that drives engagement on their platforms. The bill also ensures that dollars return directly to Oregon newsrooms—large and small—and establishes a Civic Information Consortium to support innovation, sustainability, and equity in our local news landscape.

At the University of Oregon, we believe that public policy has a critical role to play in ensuring the survival and transformation of local journalism. SB 686 is a forward-looking investment in the infrastructure of civic life. We urge you to support this legislation and

stand with the communities that depend on local news to stay informed, engaged, and connected.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering our testimony.

Sincerely,

Trent Lutz

Executive Director of Government and Community Relations

University of Oregon