

Submitter: David Sommers
On Behalf Of: Ashland.news
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1580

Chair Meek, Vice Chair Drazan and Members of the Committee:

At the direction of the Board of Directors of Ashland.news, a nonprofit, independent local news organization serving Southern Oregon, I am writing to you to communicate the board's serious concerns about and opposition to SB 1580.

The board's concerns are not new. For nearly a year, dating back to early in the 2025 session, Ashland.news and many other independent newsrooms across Oregon have consistently raised the same substantive reservations about this proposal. Ashland.news and other newsrooms have repeatedly urged bill proponents to include a broader array of local news organizations in discussions about the real-world impacts this legislation could have on Oregon's media ecosystem. Regrettably, those concerns have largely gone unaddressed, and the bill now before you remains substantially unchanged in the areas that have drawn continued concern.

The Ashland.news Board of Directors is grateful to Senator Pham and to you and your colleagues for recognizing the urgency of the financial challenges facing journalism and for proactively considering legislative approaches to improve civic information and service to Oregonians in communities of all sizes. The Board agrees that legislative action is needed. However, the Board believes this bill, as currently structured and advanced, is rushed, flawed, and not reflective of the broad array of voices serving Oregon communities today.

Among many concerns, these are among the issues particularly important for independent publishers like Ashland.news:

Under SB 1580, a significant portion of funds is not required to be used for newsroom or editorial positions, and there are limited safeguards to ensure that funds remain in Oregon or directly benefit local journalism and civic information. This 70/30 split creates a real risk that funds could be diverted to non-editorial business operations, including sales and advertising expansion, without strengthening local reporting capacity in the communities those funds are ostensibly meant to serve.

Additionally, for nearly a year, many independent publishers have advocated for a more balanced funding structure better supports the consortium model. The current 90/10 split continues to concentrate the vast majority of funds through a headcount-based formula that disproportionately benefits large legacy organizations and chains,

simply because they are the largest.

Ashland.news believes there is a path toward consensus on journalism funding legislation, and the organization is eager to be part of that work. But consensus requires meaningful engagement with the full diversity of Oregon's news ecosystem and a structure that addresses these concerns directly and proactively, not after the fact.

At this moment, Ashland.news respectfully urges you not to advance SB 1580 as written, and instead to work toward a more inclusive, deliberative approach that can produce a stronger and more broadly supported bill.

Thank you for your time and for considering the perspective of independent local news organizations serving Oregon communities.

David Sommers
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