

Chair Mark Meek
Committee on Commerce and General Government
Oregon Senate
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 1580

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I write to you today in my capacity as the Senior Director for Journalism and Civic Information at Free Press Action. Since 2003, Free Press Action has worked with federal policymakers, state lawmakers, and community leaders to strengthen our media system and democracy through policy change, with a core emphasis on supporting local news and informed communities.

We led the organizing push behind the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (a first-of-its-kind public grantmaking body to support local news), supported the enactment of the California Local News Fellowship program, and last year launched "[Local News for the People: A Policy Agenda for Meeting Civic-Information Needs](#)," which has been endorsed by more than 60 leaders and organizations in the journalism and democracy spheres. I am also a co-author of "[The Roadmap for Local News](#)," a year-long research and field-engagement effort that helped inform the creation of Press Forward, a national coalition of philanthropic organizations committed to investing more than \$500 million to strengthen local news.

These experiences continue to inform our work today. We are actively engaged with lawmakers in multiple states this session as they search for durable, public-interest solutions to the local news crisis, including in Pennsylvania, where legislators [just last week](#) advanced a local news package to establish a new grantmaking body and a state-backed journalism fellowship.

There is no doubt that this moment calls for bold legislative action. The economic foundations of local journalism have been profoundly destabilized, and policymakers are right to explore new interventions. But urgency should not push states toward approaches that risk reinforcing the very structural failures that have hollowed out local news ecosystems over the past two decades.

Based on our national policy experience, we are concerned that SB 1580 would do exactly that.

SB 1580 would disproportionately benefit large national media conglomerates

Under SB 1580, the vast majority of funds would be distributed to news organizations based primarily on newsroom size, with broad eligibility criteria and limited guardrails. The predictable

outcome is that the largest media entities operating in the state would emerge as the primary beneficiaries.

In Oregon, this includes major broadcast chains such as Sinclair Broadcast Group and Nexstar Media Group, along with large, out-of-state newspaper chains including Gannett, Lee Enterprises, Carpenter Media Group, and Advance/Newhouse. These companies operate at significant scale, employ large centralized staffs, and are structurally positioned to capture a substantial share of formula-based funding.

By contrast, independent community publishers, nonprofit newsrooms, ethnic media outlets, rural outlets, and civic media startups – the organizations that are often doing the most to fill critical information gaps and build trust with their communities – would receive a comparatively small share of funding, despite playing a leading role in charting out a new, sustainable future for local news. Allocation systems based on size and headcount primarily reward scale, not community service or public-interest impact.

Directing public funds to companies like Sinclair raises serious concerns

It is especially important to name the implications of directing public-policy-generated revenue to companies such as Sinclair Broadcast Group and Nexstar Media Group, both of which maintain a significant presence in Oregon, particularly through ownership of major, high-reach stations in the Portland market.

Sinclair and Nexstar are two of the largest local television station owners in the United States and operate under a highly centralized editorial model that has repeatedly subordinated local autonomy to corporate priorities. In early 2025, Sinclair and Nexstar drew national scrutiny for altering and pulling Jimmy Kimmel's show from the air in response to political pressure from the Trump administration – a move widely understood as prioritizing regulatory and political considerations over editorial independence.

This episode is instructive not because of partisan politics, but because it illustrates a structural reality: large, centralized media conglomerates are too often willing to compromise local editorial control when it aligns with their corporate or political interests. Even putting aside the prominence of the Kimmel censorship, Sinclair [has a history](#) of divesting from local coverage in favor of forcing local anchors to push corporate talking points. As of this very moment, Nexstar is [seeking to merge](#) with the broadcast conglomerate Tegna, further expanding concentration in the local media market.

Public funds directed to such entities risk subsidizing an approach that has caused great harm to the journalism ecosystem and to our civic health as a whole.

The bill creates downstream risks for smaller and independent outlets

When Canada enacted similar legislation, Meta [removed news](#) from its platforms nationwide. The result, as documented by journalists and publishers there, was not a leveling of the playing

field – rather, the legislation reinforced it. Larger legacy outlets were better positioned to weather the disruption, while smaller outlets were punished by losses in traffic and revenue.

As the publisher of one Canadian newsroom [told Reuters Institute](#): “The big newsrooms get bigger and the little ones get strangled... this fundamentally is not good for a healthy competitive news environment.”

Another Montreal-based publisher described the system as: “A huge gift for foreign-owned legacy media and a spit in the face of small outlets like ours and Indigenous-owned outlets.”

The same dynamic nearly played out in California, where similar proposals prompted credible threats from both Meta and Google to restrict news links. Wealthy broadcasters and corporate chains may be able to absorb these shocks. Independent community outlets with thin margins cannot.

Legal uncertainty threatens timely relief

Finally, SB 1580 faces significant legal uncertainty. During consideration of a nearly identical proposal last session, legislative counsel [raised](#) concerns that the bill “would likely be successfully challenged under Article I, section 8, of the Oregon Constitution.” Even after slight amendments, questions remained about potential conflicts with both state and federal speech protections.

These concerns align with the views of national legal experts, [who have identified](#) compulsory arbitration and bargaining-code models as among the most legally vulnerable approaches available to lawmakers when attempting to extract revenue from digital platforms. Even if SB 1580 were ultimately upheld, litigation could delay implementation for years, consuming public resources while offering little near-term relief to struggling newsrooms – relief that many community outlets simply cannot afford to wait for.

More effective paths forward exist

The underlying motive of SB 1580 – directing meaningful support to local journalism – is sound. But there are stronger, more equitable, and more legally durable approaches available.

Independent, needs-based grantmaking models have demonstrated the ability to direct resources toward underserved communities, support innovation, and reduce the risk of capture by dominant corporate players. SB 1580 includes the creation of an Oregon Civic Information Consortium, building on proven models such as New Jersey’s Civic Information Consortium and similar efforts advancing in other states. (For context, [New Jersey’s approach](#) has distributed over \$12 million to local news and civic information providers across the state since its inception in 2022, helping publish more than 13,000 stories and reaching over 90% of New Jersey counties.)

This component of the bill has attracted broad support and could stand on its own as a meaningful step forward, even as lawmakers continue to debate other aspects of the proposal.

Other policy tools – including fellowship programs, targeted tax credits, government advertising set-asides, and direct public-media investments – have likewise shown promise. If the goal is to redirect revenue from large technology platforms, legal experts [have identified](#) advertising-revenue taxes as a cleaner and more defensible option than bargaining-code models.

Free Press Action appreciates the leadership of Oregon lawmakers in confronting the local news crisis. But SB 1580, as currently structured, risks entrenching corporate dominance, exposing independent outlets to new harms, and delaying real relief for communities that urgently need better access to trustworthy local information.

There are more viable paths forward, ones that prioritize public need, local accountability, and long-term sustainability over scale and consolidation. We urge lawmakers to leave behind this flawed approach and pursue proven solutions that place the public interest, and the independent journalism that serves it, at the center of Oregon's media future.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We look forward to continued engagement on this issue.

Sincerely,

Mike Rispoli,
Senior Director, Journalism and Civic Information
Free Press Action