



Feb. 10, 2026

Senate Committee on Commerce and General Government:

Good morning. I'm submitting testimony on SB 1580. While I'd like to testify at the Feb. 11 hearing, I can only submit written testimony because I'll be participating in an important news industry gathering, the Knight Media Forum, in Miami this week.

As a 50-year veteran of local news, I deeply appreciate the Legislature's recognition of the loss of local news in Oregon and effort to help rebuild it. And as founder of Lookout Eugene-Springfield, that appreciation is doubled.

Lookout is now 10 months old in Lane County and we've been met with overwhelming community support and early membership and advertising growth beyond our (high) expectations.

Just around Christmans, former Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy sent this unsolicited email: "Just a note to tell you I read Lookout everyday and see it growing better and better. And I appreciate how much our other media has improved because of its impact. We are no longer a news-starved community and I'm very appreciative. My wish for the new year is that this model will continue to spread to give other communities back their whole community where we know what's going on and better know our neighbors. Good journalism matters!"

People want the return of robust local news. With our growing success and plans to build more Lookouts, to replace failing dailies, on the West Coast, I write to explain why I and my fellow independent Oregon local news publishers must oppose SB 1580.

While the bill's advocates have mildly reframed it from last year's stalled SB 686, the potential damage it would do far outweighs the slim offer of help it claims. Further, for us at Lookout, it would chill the opportunity to focus on our growth in Oregon, given the business obstacles it would erect. And we are among very few in Oregon planning to grow – not shrink, following both our Eugene success and five years in Santa Cruz, where our journalism won a 2024 Pulitzer for Breaking News.

I understand those business obstacles well, both as an Oregon publisher, a long-time journalist and news company executive and as a news industry analyst, having written the book *Newsonomics*, and a Harvard Nieman Lab column by the same name for more than a decade.

We have built the second-largest local newsroom in the state and that's made full use of search and social media to gain early awareness; that's essential for any digital business. We would like to follow that playbook in other Oregon locales. The passage of this legislation, no matter how well-meaning, would preclude that, if for no other reason than extended litigation is certain to follow, creating a slowing or cessation of social and search in the meantime.

Beyond that basic fact, let me add several other points that force this opposition.

Our opposition to the bill still stands, for all the same reasons we opposed it last year, and we would add several newer points to that position:

1. Significantly, we have now formed a strong, and growing, group of independent local news publishers in Oregon, the Oregon Independent News Network, a future-focused group not aiming to protect what remains of the old business, now primarily owned by hedge fund-driven chains taking the last profitable dollars out of the business as they continue to cut. In Oregon, those of us in Eugene, Portland, Ashland and Newberg have come together to assert what we think is best and right for the re-growth of local news in the state. ONPA does not speak for us. **Our joint letter of opposition to 1580 has also been submitted.**
2. As 1580's proponents have readied their second effort, they've made a point of excluding independent publishers from the discussions of "how to make the bill better." Last month, we aimed to join a wide conference call on the subject, and were not allowed past the Zoom "waiting room". In that effort, they've made a major point of keeping Lookout itself out, because of my public opposition last year, and they keep spreading the assertion that the Google News Initiative funding we have gotten disqualifies us from comment. Let's be clear on that topic. Yes, we – and dozens of other Oregon news media – have received GNI funding, and Lookout may be the only one to disclose it, *serially and publicly*. As we've been quite clear about, hundreds of Lane County's people are the primary funders of Lookout's establishment, and it is only to them that we are responsible.
3. In recent discussions, the idea of establishing an interim working group post-special session, on how to aid local press, has been raised. We all enthusiastically support that and would be glad, with our own Lookout Eugene-Springfield experience, and my own

wider experience, to participate. That's the right way to set effective and inclusive public policy.

4. As noted above, the environment for local news has only gotten tougher in the last year, as platform changes and economic uncertainty further challenge news publishing. We don't need something else to damage our business – a war with Google and Facebook – which would greatly limit readership.

I won't reiterate my more detailed critique of these bills, which the letter and my [April](#) and [June](#) columns of last year accomplish. Suffice it to say, it would reward those who have done the greatest harm to local news in Oregon and stifle those who are actually building the next generation of locally controlled, community-serving local news institutions. Lookout itself has seen a remarkable launch and community reception in Eugene-Springfield, and we would like to see our model take root elsewhere in the state. Please help us do that by first rejecting SB1580.

We are glad to further talk through any of this as helpful.

Ken Doctor

Founder and CEO, Lookout Eugene-Springfield