

Submitter: Chelsea Marr
On Behalf Of: Columbia Gorge News
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1580

To: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government

Re: Support of SB 1580

Date: 02-10-2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for Senate Bill 1580. I am Chelsea Marr, publisher and independent owner of Columbia Gorge News, a regional newspaper serving Hood River and The Dalles, Oregon, and across the river in White Salmon, Washington. We provide news to four counties in The Gorge.

I purchased the newspapers after the company I had worked for shuttered in 2020. Over my nearly thirty-year career, I have seen a steady decline as local news organizations struggle to survive. But I have also witnessed the vital importance of local news in our communities. It keeps communities connected in a way that is essential to civic engagement and quality of life.

During Covid-19, we published critical health information when guidance was changing daily. Our news is essential for a community's right to know—including coverage of local meetings and government accountability. We cover local school news and sports, cultural features, and breaking news during fires and emergencies.

Unfortunately, the largest, international technology companies are using our news content without fair compensation, creating an existential threat for our newspaper, our journalists, and our community.

Our community needs more news coverage from an organization that lives and works in the area—someone who understands the news that affects those of us who live here. We need more journalists, and they deserve a living wage.

Our coverage could be much greater. We could focus on investigative work, additional meeting coverage, and expanded coverage areas if we could afford to hire more journalists. Increasing our news coverage from weekly to twice weekly is one goal for providing more timely information to our areas.

This has not been possible due to our continued revenue decline, including a drop in advertising from those who believe our newspapers are dying. The tech platforms

have gotten rich off our content, and now, with AI summaries, our website traffic has taken a significant hit.

Some organizations opposed to this bill would like you to believe it will hurt local news, but this is far from the truth. Oregon news will be stronger when it is compensated fairly for the content we generate. This bill has the ability to help all media by providing compensation to Oregon journalism—from the smallest to the largest. In addition, the consortium will benefit nonprofits that help train our future journalists.

When newsrooms close, Oregonians lose. And make no mistake—we are on a losing path: civic participation is declining, misinformation is spreading, and public trust is weakening. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity to reinvest in our newsrooms.

SB 1580 is a fair and necessary step to restore the conditions in which local journalism – and democracy – can thrive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Marr

Columbia Gorge News