

Oregon Independent News Network

Chair Meek, Vice Chair Drazan, and Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce and General Government -

We write to you as the newly formed Oregon Independent News Network — a coalition of voices representing independent local news publishing in Oregon. Independent local news publishing is a dynamic and swiftly growing sector of news media that offers the most significant opportunity for ensuring the continued availability of local news in the state. As the 2026 legislative session gets underway, we want to share why a journalism funding bill being reintroduced this year, [SB 1580](#), is extremely concerning to members of the independent news publishing industry here in Oregon.

We are grateful that local news has drawn the attention of well-meaning lawmakers and agree there is an urgency to address the local news funding crisis. While we believe lawmakers pursuing this bill have good intentions, SB 1580 will do more to harm the future of trustworthy local news for Oregonians, by Oregonians. That's why, as a group and individually, we strongly oppose SB 1580.

We strongly urge lawmakers to convene an interim task force on the issue of funding journalism, bringing all stakeholders to the table so that future legislation will truly benefit all of Oregon's news publishing industry.

The problems with SB 1580

Independent news publishers have often been excluded from discussions of how this legislation could be improved to better serve Oregonians. This is deeply disappointing. SB 1580 would harm Oregon residents, reducing their access to local news and information, which are fundamental to our democratic processes and participation. Here's how:

The distribution formula is weighted toward legacy media, many with out-of-state ownership

It is very likely the majority of the funds in the bill will go to conglomerates and legacy media organizations. SB 1580 calls for a headcount-based funding distribution formula without a per-outlet cap on funds. Since most of Oregon's news outlets have [out-of-state owners](#), the primary beneficiaries of this legislation are outside of Oregon. Further, many of these owners are the ones responsible for the great decline of local news, as they have demanded high profit margins. In any legislation, we believe that lawmakers should make every effort to ensure that as much money stays in Oregon as possible.

This type of formula also rewards newsroom size and staffing levels, incentivizing quantity of journalism content over quality. This is particularly detrimental to more rural newsrooms that are owner-operated or have less staffing capability, but have equally important needs as larger newsrooms.

High risk of platform retaliation poses an existential threat to independent publishers

Local independent publishers — especially ones that are entirely online — rely heavily on platforms like Google and Meta to drive traffic to their sites and help more people discover their work. Google ran a test that [shut off link traffic](#) in California when legislation like this was proposed, and Meta still [does not allow](#) news links on their sites in Canada because of their bargaining code law, the Online News Act. Further, other attempts to extract a "fair share" from the platforms have backfired; [witness](#) Washington State's digital ad tax that has mainly penalized small businesses.

Local publishers in Canada are struggling to cope with losing access to Meta platforms as a means of distributing news and reaching audiences. Since Canada's bargaining code law went into effect, some publications have seen drops of up to 80 [percent](#) in referral traffic.

Whether any of us believes it is fair or not, risks of retaliation are high, and very concerning to the sustainability of our existing local independent publishers in Oregon. Further, without such social or search awareness, it will become more difficult to launch new news sites in communities that need one. This is more than a hypothetical question, as companies consider such launches, given that many markets in Oregon are currently underserved.

Additionally, Google and Meta cutting off news sites in Oregon would enable more disinformation and pink slime publications to flourish without having legitimate counterweights. The risk of disinformation is already severe, and would only be exacerbated if legitimate Oregon-based publications could not be accessed in the state.

The threat of these companies shutting off access to Oregon publications is disturbing, and poses an existential risk to many local independent publishers that we simply cannot ignore. News is shared on social media platforms, and disseminated through massive search engines, whether we like it or not. Losing access to these tools as a viable transmission source would be devastating for independent publishers, and deprive Oregonians of access to vital local news in the way they are accustomed to.

Legislation this consequential shouldn't be rushed when no "proof of concept" exists

Oregon's 2026 legislative session lasts a mere 35 days, leaving almost no time to debate, allow for public input, or iron out critical details in legislation. If SB 1580 were passed and signed into law this year, Oregon would be standing alone as the only state to create a journalism bargaining code program like this in the United States. California attempted bargaining code legislation in 2024 but abandoned it and opted for a [settlement](#) instead.

Local news publishers already carry a high-risk burden simply being in the news business. Novel legislation such as this carries a higher level of risk and therefore should not be rushed through a short session. Its consequences are unclear and untested.

High likelihood of prolonged litigation, delaying payments to publishers

There is a very real concern that SB 1580 could violate state and federal constitutional protections of free speech. Legislative [counsel](#) opined on this last session for a similar version of the bill, SB 686, and said, "[w]e believe the bill would likely be successfully challenged under Article I, section 8, of the Oregon Constitution." Even after amendments to the bill, concerns remained that it could violate state and federal speech protections. Even if the legislation were to ultimately prevail in court, it would likely take years and countless taxpayer dollars to get to that point. News publishers in Oregon don't have that kind of time to wait for funding relief, and this bill is far from a guarantee of it happening.

Alternative solutions to SB 1580

We believe there are other policy solutions the Oregon legislature could pursue to help journalists,

without threatening the existence of many independent publishers in our state.

Pass the Oregon Civic Information Consortium in a standalone bill

One of the positive things about SB 1580 is its creation of the Oregon Civic Information Consortium. This funding model is proven successful. New Jersey's Civic Information Consortium has invested over \$12 million into local news and other civic information projects. This type of direct investment in local news businesses is important to their ongoing success and financial sustainability. Grants through an Oregon CIC would help local news publishers expand the scope of their coverage, better serve their communities, and hire more journalists.

Establish a state fellowship program for local news

Local news fellowship programs invest early in journalism talent and place them in community newsrooms to help existing publishers grow their reporting capacity and cover important issues that otherwise would never be reported on. Local journalism fellowship programs are a proven model and have been successfully piloted in other states, including California, New Mexico, and Washington.

Designate a percentage of state government advertising dollars to Oregon-based news

Passing legislation that would set aside at least 50 percent of the state's advertising budget for Oregon-owned news outlets would be a strong form of direct support to local news publications. This is yet another tested approach to funding journalism and is budget neutral.

There are multiple other policies — including different types of tax credits — that could be pursued to help local journalists without threatening their livelihood.

We want to reiterate that we believe the intention behind this bill is good. We are truly grateful that lawmakers recognize the delicate nature of our democracy, and the threat posed to it by a crisis in journalism funding. We simply believe SB 1580 is not the solution to this crisis.

We ask that you weigh the concerns of local independent news publishers and supporters like ourselves if this legislation reaches your desk this year.

Sincerely,

The Oregon Independent News Network

[Newsberg](#) (Newberg, OR)

[Ashland.news](#) (Ashland, OR)

[Lookout Eugene-Springfield](#) (Eugene and Springfield, OR)

[Gales Creek Journal](#) (Gales Creek, OR)

[News in the Grove](#) (Forest Grove, OR)

[Willamette Week](#) (Portland, OR)