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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or SB1580
Topic:

Testimony in opposition to SB 1580

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

I write in opposition to SB 1580 and to encourage the establishment of a working group that represents all the relevant parties in this crucial effort to support Oregon journalism and democracy.

While I write as a private citizen, I am a retired professor of journalism at the University of Oregon where I served as dean of the School of Journalism and Communication for 16 of my 34 years on the faculty. While dean, I served on the boards of the Oregon Newspaper Publisher Association (ONPA), the Oregon Newspaper Foundation (ONF), and the Oregon Association of Broadcasters (OAB).

There is no question that we must find sustainable solutions for the local news crisis and I applaud the Legislature's commitment to this effort. However, SB 1580 is not that solution. As written, the bill has the potential to kill local independent publishers who are charting the future of journalism, while offering an uncertain financial life line that is likely to be tied up in expensive litigation for years.

Reading through the posted testimony, I see letters of support for the bill from friends, colleagues in the news business and former students. These relationships and my experience working with many of the newspapers in the ONPA make it difficult for me to write in opposition to SB 1580. However, despite its good intentions, the bill's flaws outweigh any positive impact it may have.

Given the concerns raised by Free Press Action, the Local Independent Online News Publishers, the Oregon Independent Publishers and others, I strongly urge the Legislature to abandon SB 1580 and to instead establish an inclusive working group to review the range of efforts under way in various states and beyond to address the local news crisis. Further, advocates for meaningful change must consult with a broad range of news organizations in Oregon to chart a way forward – failure to do so dooms any chance of success. Done properly, the working group's efforts should result in a legislative proposal that garners broad support for long-lasting, structural change that sustains strong, vibrant news gathering enterprises serving local communities.

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