

MALHEUR ENTERPRISE

The Voice of Malheur County

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Senate General Government and Emergency Preparedness Committee

SENATE BILL 1506

SUBMITTED TESTIMONY

Les Zaitz, publisher, Malheur Enterprise

Dear senators,

The shaky handwriting was clearly the work of an elderly woman, writing from her home in Ontario, Oregon. She had mailed a check for \$5 to the Malheur Enterprise to help cover escalating fees being imposed for records by Malheur County officials.

“Thank you for keeping us informed,” she wrote.

She had a lot of company in sending money to the Enterprise. Citizens of Malheur County made clear with their notes and their contributions to the newspaper’s “Dollars for Disclosure” campaign that they highly valued government transparency and access to public records. In Oregon’s poorest county, citizens gave more than \$4,000 in one month to ensure their local newspaper could afford the price of government records.

I share this by way of providing my unqualified support for Senate Bill 1506 and opposition to the dash-one amendments.

The Oregon Public Records Advisory Council in its short life has established itself in the minds of Oregonians as a safeguard for that government transparency. And during the political conflagration over the treatment of Oregon’s first public records advocate, Oregonians appeared to speak in concert about their interest in seeing that the council and the advocate operate free of political interference.

This is a “good government” piece of legislation building on the wisdom of the 2017 Legislature to create the council in the first place.

The amendment is about restraining this Council in ways that serve political and not the public interest. The proposal implies that the citizens the Senate vetted and approved for service on the Council can’t be trusted to execute their civic duties. As a journalist with a record of service to our state of more than 45 years, I find that implication not only puzzling but insulting. The amendment is intended to keep the status quo and impose new limits on the council’s ability to serve Oregonians.

I urge you to adopt SB 1506 and reject any effort to cloud the Public Record Advisory Council’s needed independence to serve the public interest.

CONTACT:

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