

My name is Heidi Wright. I am the COO of EO Media Group and Publisher of The Bulletin in Bend, Oregon. I'm testifying today in support of HB 2605.

I've been in Medford a lot in the last few weeks, since the abrupt shutdown of the Mail Tribune on January 13, because our company sees the opportunity to serve the Rogue Valley with the journalism they want and expect to have in such a vibrant part of our state.

The community response has been overwhelming. One person told me they feel like the fabric of Medford is mending after the gaping hole left by a failed experiment of the former owner of the newspaper.

The message has been loud and clear, they want reporters back out in the community, capturing the stories in words and photos, doing their jobs with the integrity and trust of trained professional journalists. I'm happy to report the journalists want the same and in the past 10 days, we've restaffed with a newsroom of 12 and an awesome editor leading the charge.

Now that the important people are hired, we'll finish staffing up the Rogue Valley Tribune for a total of 32 positions and begin the business of running a sustainable community newspaper.

I can tell you from firsthand experience in the past two weeks, much like it was 3-1/2 years ago in Bend, people care about their newspapers as much as they care about their communities, I suppose because they see a strong connection between the two.

We are here today because someone cared enough to bring this bill forward and see if there is a way to help stabilize an industry in transition and find a sustainable path forward. Thank you, Representative Pham and all of the co-sponsors of this legislation for caring about our industry and the value journalism holds in your communities.

We understand as newspaper operators that no one is willing to (nor should they) fund a failing business model, with public or private funds. We need to evolve as an industry and ensure we, first and foremost, keep journalists employed and at the center of our business plan, because without them, we will fail. Our product isn't the newspaper in your driveway or mailbox, that's just a delivery method. Our product is the journalism we produce and that is what we need to protect.

Fortunately, there are a lot of smart people in our industry that are figuring out how to stabilize and connect that reporting, even in the smallest of communities, to new audiences that value credible, relevant journalism. Our company has been fortunate enough to be learning from some of the best in the industry over the past two years, which gives me the hope I'm sharing with you today that there is a path forward and we can collectively figure this out.

This funding isn't about helping a few or propping up a failing business model I mentioned earlier. It's about testing and trying new ways to evolve as news gathering organizations, be it for-profit or non-profit, traditional community journalism or emerging platforms that have the tenants of journalism at their core. It's about a runway to fix an industry that has been decimated

by big tech and greedy hedge funds. It about journalists being present and living in both metro and rural communities around the state, because without someone there, especially in isolated markets, there would have been no coverage of the arrests of five Guatemalan immigrants by ICE in Hermiston, the bullying and suicide of LGBTQ teen Jadin Bell in La Grande, or the death in police custody of a mentally ill, homeless man in Warrenton. Those are stories from our archives in just the last few years. No doubt every other news organization in Oregon has similar stories in their archives.

Someone shared a quote awhile back that stuck with me: news deserts are democracy deserts. No one wants another news desert to pop up in Oregon or anywhere else in this country.

We'd like to see the number of reporters around the state go up, not down, over the next several years and give our future journalists an opportunity to make a difference in Oregon.

Thank you for your time today and again for caring about our industry and all of the news organizations and journalists in the State of Oregon.