

Date: February 9, 2023  
To: House Committee on Rules  
From: **Paul Steinle, President of Board, Ashland.news, Ashland, Oregon**  
Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and members of the committee:

I have served as a professional journalist for 29 years, including two years as president of UPI. Subsequently, I taught journalism until 2019 in graduate and undergraduate settings at the University of Miami, Quinnipiac University, and Southern Oregon University. Now I'm serving as Board president for Ashland.news.

Beginning in 2010, my wife, Sara Brown, and I visited 50 outstanding newspapers – one in each state – and documented the status of small, medium and major newspapers by collecting data and recording conversations with editors to fill a website: [www.WhoNeedsNewspapers.org](http://www.WhoNeedsNewspapers.org).

That website tells the story about local newspapers' struggle to survive in the digital age by adding the digital delivery of news in parallel with their print products.

Newspapers' problems are well documented: the loss of classified ad revenue to Craig's List, a revenue marketplace fractionalized by online and social media competition, and supplementary digital income earned at rates valued at about only 10% of parallel print ads.

Diminishing revenue is central to the story of newspaper decline. The decrease in newspaper industry revenue has led to a concomitant decline in editorial staffing, decreased funds for printing daily, and a decline in investment into an industry with shrinking profits.

Meantime, as local newspapers shrunk and in some cases closed, the complexities and challenges of community life have persisted. Today many small communities find themselves as *news deserts* – barren of central civic information. Reliable information is needed to identify key facts about local problems and achievements, and ethical news services are needed to provide a public forum for citizens to debate local issues or celebrate community achievements.

That's a fancy way of saying what the owner-publisher of a 5,000-circulation, weekly community newspaper, The Sequoyah Times in Sallisaw, Oklahoma, told us – in plain English – when we asked him what his paper did for his community.

"Well, we're sort of the glue that helps hold it together," Jim Mayo told us. Then he added, "If you take out the glue, it [the community] disintegrates."

We heard Jim's fundamental assessment of a newspaper's role repeated, in similar iterations, by many editors and publishers as we visited our 50 newspapers.

Since January 14, 2022, a group of us in Ashland, Oregon, have been building a digital community news service using professional journalists to serve our community of 20,000-plus and prevent that "disintegration" here.

Our task is to replace The Ashland Daily Tidings, a community newspaper that had reliably done the local news-gathering job for 140-plus years before it was closed in 2021.

Today, our model is the local, community-funded, nonprofit, PBS radio station archetype. We're operating on financial support that flows directly from community donors and foundations that support our mission.

Every Oregon community needs reliable news and information to provide the "glue" that community needs. At present, few Oregon institutions and foundations supply guidance and/or start-up capital for such projects. The missions cited in HB 2605 would support key local institutions that want to do that.

For that reason, we urge support for HB 2650, which would support the survival of local journalism, enable unheard voices to emerge, and encourage more communities to create information services such as Ashland.news.

These funds would eventually be used to support local, independent, nonprofit community news services – circulating reliable information that every community needs to deliberate, govern, and prosper.

For these reasons, we urge your support for Protecting Local Journalism and urge this measure be funded fully. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Paul Steinle

President of the Board, Ashland.news  
PO Box 640  
Ashland, Oregon, 975290