

Submitter: Molly OBrien  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Rules  
Measure: HB2605

Date: February 9, 2023

To: House Committee on Rules

From: MOLLY O'BRIEN, HERALD & NEWS (Klamath Falls)

Re: Support for Protect Local Journalism, HB 2605

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

My name is Molly O'Brien, and the following is my written testimony in support of HB 2605 - Protect Local Journalism.

As a newspaper reporter in the Southern Oregon news desert, the cruciality of bolstering local journalism is apparent, and action is needed now.

The community I serve, which consists of Klamath and a portion of Lake Counties, makes national headlines regularly. Between the decade-long drought, pending dam removal projects (largest in American history), devastating wildfires, semi-automatic gun-carrying counter-protests (incited by disinformation), threats of domestic terrorism (groups planning to literally open the floodgates), potential extinction of multiple endemic species and water crises disputes that span multiple generations, our community is teeming with news about which the community and the overall country need to know.

As we are the only local news source in this region, and as I am the only on-staff reporter at this time, providing coverage of these and a plethora of other issues is more than overwhelming.

With the passing of HB 2605 and the formation of a Local Journalism Resource Center, reporters like me, who are new to the field and have not yet received their degrees, would have somewhere to turn when in need of professional support.

Since we do not have the staffing, funding or community engagement necessary to consistently hold up our end, much of our community has lost faith in us. Many of our own local agencies, with which the newspaper once had strong working relationships, now avoid all contact and refuse to respond to any attempts to communicate.

Being forced to navigate circumstances where the Freedom of the Press is ignored, where the media is perceived as an enemy that is not to be trusted, degrades the quality of a newspaper's stories. Loss of quality facilitates further loss of community support. We need resources, experts we can turn to when come up against those barriers. And most of all, we need more journalists.

HB 2605 includes plans to provide aid to Oregon publications; helps fund and support the growth of the field of journalism; and would help raise our numbers by making a faster, more convenient and more effective means of learning the skills of the trade.

Our community needs these resources so that we can rebuild our staff and regain the

trust and engagement of residents. The people of this community deserve to have local news they can depend on. We need to provide them with a watchdog.

We're doing everything that we can, and we can see the good that comes from it.

Low-income housing tenants that facing wrongful eviction during the holidays came to us to tell their story; the harassment stopped after it went to print.

Community attendance at local government meetings increased substantially once we began reporting on the meetings, with greater public involvement and more voices being heard.

But the citizens deserve more than journalists that can barely keep their heads above water, and that's what we are working towards. That is what we are aiming for by supporting this bill.

Please, show support for Oregon communities by supporting local journalism. Vote to approve HB 2605.

Best,

Molly O'Brien  
Reporter  
Herald & News