



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Testimony in Support of HB 2605**

February 9, 2023

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

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for House District 46. I am honored to bring forward this bill to protect and support Oregon’s local journalism. I want to acknowledge the struggling news and media environment in Oregon that has seen several important news outlets, like the Medford Mail Tribune, shut down or be cut back even since the beginning of this session. You’ll hear many voices today from our coalition, but I want to thank **a few** of our core coalition members who are doing exceptional work to maintain vital media and information lifelines to our communities: the Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon and the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism, or FORJ.

I also want to thank my co-chief sponsors, Rep. Bowman, Rep. Walters, Rep. Dexter, Sen. Gelsler Blouin and many others – through this process I’ve learned about all our legislator colleagues who care deeply about local journalism and the civic health of our communities.

Because the collapse of local newspapers and other local media affects not just individual communities but the health of our democracy itself. From the housing crisis, to the economic stresses caused by the pandemic, from disappearing water supplies, to uncontrollable wildfire and extreme heat waves, **Oregonians’ very lives depend on the information that our news sources can provide.** Our communities have to have a shared understanding of our problems before we can solve them and that shared understanding depends on having access to high quality local news.

Today, in the vacuum created by the collapse of much local news media, misinformation is masquerading as news content and growing - while legitimate news organizations are struggling.

To me, this is a fundamental issue of democracy. The media is often referred to as the “4th branch of government” because our democracy cannot survive without an informed public. Local journalism provides a forum for respectful discussion and debate and **provides an accountability check on our government officials and agencies.** Our information and news infrastructure are vital to the very functioning of our communities, so we must invest in the health of our media ecosystem.

That is why I am bringing forward HB 2605: the Protect Local Journalism Act. This Act will provide public investment to bolster local journalism across every corner of Oregon.

The Protect Local Journalism Act would provide one-time funding for a community-informed working group, co-convened by the [Agora Journalism Center at UO](#) and [Fund for Rural](#)

**Journalism.** This work group would include local news media, nonprofits, publishers, universities, philanthropies, civic organizations, and other entities to create and sustain a **civic information workgroup**. Together, they would pilot a Local Journalism Resource Center that would issue **emergency grants** to support local journalism, **address news deserts** and come up with ways to support Oregon's unique community information needs. The group would include attention to the health of multilingual ethnic media ecosystems and support for more diverse newsrooms and journalists in Oregon. This work group would prepare a report by November 2024 with legislative concept recommendations for the 2025 session.

Our coalition is bringing forward an amendment to the bill that removes the tax credit portion of this bill, so that this workgroup, if HB 2605 passes, can bring back the best recommendations uniquely fit for Oregon.

We are incredibly fortunate that in Oregon, the news and information community has already started coming together around the shared principles of truth, community, democracy, and fairness. They're *already* doing this work to support local journalism, but their work can be strengthened and taken to the next level with our legislature's support.

The public is served when they know what is happening in their local communities. Oregonians are served when they have news writers who come from their communities and understand their communities. I know that I am a better legislator when I have access to investigative reporting and analysis from abundant media outlets. This legislature is served when we hear all the stories in our state, both the challenges and the successes, the fears and frustrations as well as the hopes and bold solutions that local news reporting can bring to light. ...And of course our entire state benefits when reporters are investigating what their elected officials and state agencies are doing and how well we are serving the public interest.

The problems of our Democracy are indeed complex and multifaceted, but this measure is one, concrete step we can take to mend what is broken in our media ecosystem.

I urge your support for HB 2605. Thank you for hearing this bill. we have an amazing line up of speakers who can share more about why this bill is needed and how it will strengthen their communities. I do have a committee mtg I need to return to, but I can stick around to answer a couple quick questions, and otherwise I'll leave you in the very capable hands of the other testifiers.