

Written Testimony in Support of SB 686: The Oregon Journalism Protection Act Submitted to the Oregon Legislature

Dear members of the Oregon Legislature,

Local news is a cornerstone of civic health because it fosters engagement, accountability, and a sense of community connection. It also equips citizens with the information they need to actively participate in democracy, hold institutions accountable, and solve problems together.

Unfortunately, local news in Oregon is facing an existential crisis.

A recent report from the Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication highlights alarming trends: Since late 2022, nearly 20 Oregon newspapers have closed or merged, with newsroom budgets and staff rapidly shrinking. Over the past 18 years, 27% of the state's newspapers have closed, leaving many communities with little or no access to reliable local news. These closures harm civic life, increase misinformation, and exacerbate social isolation.

One of the most significant contributors to this crisis is the exploitation of local news content by mega-digital platforms like Google and Facebook. These platforms profit enormously from news content without fairly compensating the newsrooms that produce it, costing U.S. news organizations an estimated \$14 billion annually. While smaller platforms have embraced shared-revenue models, these mega-platforms have resisted paying appropriate licensing and copyright fees, threatening the financial viability of local journalism.

SB 686, the Oregon Journalism Protection Act, offers a timely and necessary solution to address these challenges. By requiring major platforms to fairly compensate Oregon news publishers for the content that drives their traffic and profits, this legislation rebalances the playing field and reinvests in local journalism.

Key provisions of SB 686:

- Ensures platforms contribute a fair share of revenue, with funds distributed based on the number of journalists employed, incentivizing newsrooms to maintain or grow their staff.
- Requires at least 70% of revenue to go directly to newsroom staff and operations and ensures transparency and accountability through annual reporting.

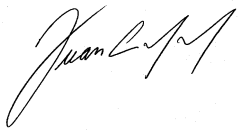
- Establishes the Oregon Civic Information Consortium, a nonprofit housed at the University of Oregon, to provide grants supporting underserved, rural, and startup publications, as well as ethnic media outlets.

SB 686 draws inspiration from successful initiatives in Canada, Australia, and other U.S. states, proving that these models can sustain journalism while fostering innovation and sustainability.

Without intervention, more Oregon communities will become “news deserts,” deprived of access to fact-based reporting about local governments, schools, and civic life. This bill is a critical step toward protecting Oregon’s public service journalism and empowering local communities.

I urge you to pass SB 686 and take decisive action to preserve the essential role of local news in Oregon’s democracy.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Juan-Carlos Molleda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Juan" being the most prominent.

Juan-Carlos Molleda

Edwin L. Artzt Dean and Professor since 2016

School of Journalism and Communication

University of Oregon