

Submitter: Chelsea Marr
On Behalf Of: Columbia Gorge News
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB686

Testimony of Chelsea Marr
Owner/Publisher, Columbia Gorge News

Chair, Members of the Committee:

My name is Chelsea Marr, and I am the owner and publisher of the Columbia Gorge News, in Hood River and The Dalles, that serves four rural counties in The Gorge. In March 2020, when our region's legacy newspapers shuttered after a century of service, I committed to sustaining local journalism as a civic necessity. Today, I urge you to prioritize policies that protect Oregon's rural news ecosystems.

Columbia Gorge News has become a trusted voice in our community. We provide hyper-local information. Our reporters document school board decisions, public health updates, and fiscal stewardship—functions increasingly neglected as newsrooms shrink. We offer community cohesion, publishing items that bind rural residents including obituaries, local sports, and civic achievements.

Senate Bill 686 offers a sustainable model by requiring large platforms to compensate local news organizations for accessing our websites and content, framework proven in other states. This revenue would directly address staffing shortfalls, enabling coverage of underserved communities. With more financial support for journalists, we could hire more full-time journalists, which would mean more in-depth and investigative reporting on issues our readers care most about, such as governance, emergencies, and community events.

The competitive inequality in our business allows digital platforms to aggregate our content without compensation, diverting revenue while relying on our reporting to drive engagement. As a newspaper owner, I pay my journalists a salary and it makes sense for Big Tech to compensate our journalists for the stories they write for our newspapers.

I urge this body to advance SB 686 to secure fair compensation for local journalism. This is an investment in civic infrastructure by prioritizing policies that sustain rural newsrooms.

The Columbia Gorge News has endured through resilience, but legislative action will determine whether rural Oregon retains its rural newspapers. Thank you.

Chelsea Marr

Publisher, Columbia Gorge News
Hood River, Oregon