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Opinion: Misguided Bill Would Hammer Local Print Media

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Newspapers and magazines go to every corner of this state. Notwithstanding increased digital access, paper publications are delivered to tens of thousands of homes that lack broadband internet and homes where readers simply are more comfortable with the familiar format of paper or want to save magazines on travel, food, world events or hobbies.

Oregon's newspapers and magazines care deeply about environmental responsibility. Newsprint and magazine stock paper come from certified forests, are fully compostable and biodegrade in a manner of months. Newsprint is so safe that it can be used as vegetable garden mulch. Inks are linseed-oil-based and non-toxic, and adhesives are water-soluble.

A well-intentioned but misguided piece of legislation in the Oregon Senate, [Senate Bill 582](#), would create an expensive "Extended Producer Responsibility" system for municipal solid waste. The bill recognizes that magazines and newspapers are different from other materials by allowing fees to be paid through advertising, but the fees simply should not apply to non-toxic, biodegradable materials – again, newspapers and magazines biodegrade within months.

News is vital to American civic life, and legislation causing financial hardship to newspapers and magazines will erode citizen access to factual and trusted news and information. Newspapers are the sole source of local news for many communities throughout the state. Coverage of town meetings, food pantry locations, classified ads and business news are the lifeblood of community newspapers. Yet this legislation discriminates against news and information published on paper, as opposed to information that is circulated in digital formats.

EPR systems in other jurisdictions have failed to increase recycling rates for paper, which are already much higher than other products. In British Columbia, recycling rates are trending downwards while producer fees have increased markedly. This is not tenable in Oregon, when economic conditions related to the pandemic have caused significant reduction in advertising revenues for magazines and newspapers. To offset marked increases in cost, the legislation could force publications to eliminate home delivery to rural areas, exacerbating the digital divide, and cut journalism jobs.

A recent study by [Broadbandnow ranks Oregon 34th](#) among states based on broadband deployment, speeds and access to low-priced plans. Those without broadband depend on paper.

We strongly urge the Oregon Legislature to consider the impact of this legislation on magazines and newspapers. There are more appropriate ways to reclaim post-consumer waste without disadvantaging the state's vital news and information sources.