



Testimony of Anne Galloway, Executive Director of the Vermont Journalism Trust
February 8, 2018 – House Government Operations Committee

Good afternoon Madame chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

I appreciate this committee's work to update our state's open meeting law, and I hope you will consider the important issue relating to the definition of a 21st century news organization, and its role pertaining to public notices.

Last year's passage of the Shield Law is clear evidence the Vermont legislature recognizes the vital role journalism has in our democracy and that online news organizations are a viable part of that.

My testimony today focuses on VTDigger as one credible example of the evolution of online news.

I will explain how, through the support of thousands of readers, the organization has grown to execute its mission every day throughout Vermont.

VTDigger is a nonprofit online news daily dedicated to public service journalism. VTDigger's mission is to produce rigorous journalism that explains complex issues, holds the government accountable to the public, and engages Vermonters in the democratic process.

Our readers do not have to pay any fees or subscribe to access our content.

Since its founding in 2009, VTDigger has grown approximately 30% every year in terms of readership, reporting staff and revenue.

VTDigger currently has 200,000 unique monthly readers and 10,000 daily readers and is read in every Vermont county.

We have grown from a staff of one to a staff of 19.

Within the last two and a half years, VTDigger has hired reporters in Chittenden, Windham, Rutland and Bennington counties, in addition to Washington, D.C., to fill the gaps left by a dwindling print news industry -- a decade long national phenomenon that has definitely impacted Vermont.

I share these statistics with the committee to illustrate how thousands of Vermonters, from the NEK to Bennington, have become informed citizens by using online news media .

Online news organizations have evolved to become a center of civic engagement. Readers have become very adroit in exploiting digital news sites. At VTDigger, readers leave news tips, provide commentary, submit and access press releases, and converse through our comment section. Many readers have told us that VTDigger is a valuable resource in their professional work life.

I hope you will consider adding language to your bill that recognizes the evolution of the news industry and its role as a viable tool for citizens to participate in the democratic process. It is important to recognize the reality of how citizens get their news in the 21st century and how public officials want to reach their communities. I hope you will consider offering clear choices to public officials to ensure they can keep their citizens informed in the manner most appropriate for them.

Thank you again for this opportunity and for your vigilance in helping Vermonters gain full access to the important public information they need.