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## **Testimony on H. 244 An Act Relating to State Contracting Standards for Advertising**

Thank you for inviting us here today to talk with you about H. 244.

I will be brief in my remarks in order to allow time for our fabulous line up of witnesses.

Why did I introduce H. 244? `

Back in the summer, the piece in Seven Days that referenced the UVM Journalism Conference caught my attention. While the data in the article on the state of local news was not surprising, it was alarming. Knowing that as we lose journalists and local news outlets, more and more people will turn to Facebook and TikTok for their news.

I was in particular intrigued by Rebuilding Local News organization. They were one of the organizations that had presented at the conference. I reached out to them, and was able to meet with staff there who walked me through many of the model policies and laws from their website.

I decided that for sure I wanted to see what we can do in Vermont and have put in a bill request to introduce some of these model bills. While many of these bills would have a price tag attached to them, I also know that the legislature would not be in a spending mode right now and I know journalists and news outlets will be even more vulnerable than they already are in the next few years.

So ideally, H. 244 will not cost additional funding, but would redirect the funds that the State of Vermont already spends to support our local Vermont resources.

I learned that Richard Watts had convened a meeting of reps from Digger, Vermont Public, Seven Days, CAX and CNS. The goal was to identify follow-up initiatives that would help all of Vermont's local media outlets and to look at the legislative work of Rebuild Local News.

I also learned that our colleague Representative Waters Evans had also been doing research on this topic, I reached out to her and we were excited to join forces and work together.

I would be happy to provide additional information. Below are some links to some relevant articles

### **Relevant Facts:**

#### **Nationally:**

“Some 2,900 American newspapers have shuttered since 2005, and two more fail each week on average. Roughly half of all U.S. counties now have only one local news organization. More than 200 have [none at all](#).”

Seven Days, July 2024.

#### **Vermont:**

“But a deeper look at the state of Vermont journalism tells a more worrisome story. The number of people working in the industry shrunk from 1,446 in 2000 to just 358 in 2023, according to the University of Vermont's [Center for Community News](#). Some papers look like ghosts of their former selves, none more so than the daily *Burlington Free Press*, where print circulation plummeted from a high of 52,000 in the 1990s to 3,700 as of last fall. [Its newsroom](#), which once employed more than 60 journalists, has only six reporters who work under a single editor.” Seven Days, July 2024

Below are links to articles:

[Vermont's Local News Publishers Are Endangered. Can They Be Saved? | Seven Days Vermont](#)

[How Seven Days Defies the Odds | Local News Initiative](#)

[Small Business Advertising & Local News - Rebuild Local News](#)

[Building a Stronger Local Media Ecosystem: The Role of Media Policy - Columbia Journalism Review](#)

[Policy-palooza: How Congress, state and local governments can stabilize local news – Knight Foundation](#)

[Meet The States Using Public Funding to Support Local Journalism – Nieman Reports](#)

[Variety of state legislative supports for local news media act as a series of experiments](#)