

My name is Wendy Mays and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Association of Broadcasters (VAB), the non-profit trade association that supports the more than 100 over-the-air broadcast television and radio stations operating throughout Vermont.

Many of those stations have broadcast news departments who are dedicated to providing fact based non-biased local news that Vermonters trust to keep them informed.

We understand and appreciate that the objective of H.697 is to protect Vermont's first responders as they engage in public safety calls and absolutely agree that the work they do is critically important. We also understand and appreciate that based on prior testimony, journalists are not the target of this bill. However, that does not relieve the concerns we have about including H.697 in an Emergency Management and Disaster Response Omnibus Bill.

Just because journalists are not the target, it would still require them to stay 25 feet away from any news worthy event and that may be an unintended consequence. A distance that far will impact their ability to confirm facts, get clear audio and/or video and obtain anything else needed to properly report their news story.

We appreciate the description of journalists made in prior testimony as being respectful on scene and take pride in the code of conduct that professional journalists abide by, but they do still have a job to do and if they are forced to stay 25 feet away from any news worthy event, it severely hinders that ability.

So, I am hoping that this committee will keep an open mind and consider carefully whether it is worth it to sacrifice journalists ability to properly report news on the scene of an emergency event by creating a blanket 25 foot rule for *all* people regardless of their profession.

Finally, I want to reiterate that there are questions about whether arbitrarily limiting the public and media's access to events occurring in public spaces is unconstitutional federally. The U.S. Seventh Circuit [struck down](#) a similar law in Indiana last year and media organizations have similar challenges in Louisiana and Tennessee. So if a law like this were to be enacted in Vermont, we would expect that it too would be challenged in court on federal constitutional grounds.

I appreciate this committee giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of Vermont's hard working broadcast journalists and am happy to answer questions.