

California bill requiring Big Tech to pay for news placed on hold until 2024

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A California bill that would force tech companies such as Facebook and Google to pay publishers for news content has been put on hold in the Legislature until 2024.

The California Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, sponsored

by Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, would direct digital advertising giants to pay news outlets a "journalism usage fee" when they sell advertising alongside news content. The [bill](#) would require publishers to invest 70% of those funds in preserving journalism jobs in California.

The bill passed in the Assembly with bipartisan support June 1 and moved on to the state Senate. A hearing was initially scheduled for July 11, but Wicks' office announced Friday it would be rescheduled for 2024, picking back up at the same point in the legislative process.

"I've agreed to make AB 886 a two-year bill in order to ensure the strongest legislation possible—because getting this policy right is more important than getting it quick," Wicks said in a news release.

Senator Tom Umberg, D-Santa Ana, will hold an informational hearing this fall to further explore issues the bill attempts to address and look at examples of successful legislation in other countries to inform the California bill.

"This interim hearing underscores my commitment to protecting journalism, California journalists and the access to a free and vibrant press that is essential to our democracy," Umberg said in the news release. "My greatest concern is that we enact legislation that is fair, and that the benefits in this bill flow specifically to support local journalists—and in turn, all Californians."

The California Legislature convenes in two-year sessions, and bills introduced in the first year of a session can be carried over to the second year. A first-year bill must pass its house of origin by Jan. 31 of the second year to be extended, but there's no guarantee that the bill will be picked up again.

The bill has received strong support from news advocacy groups including the California News Publishers Assn. and the News/Media Alliance. (The Los Angeles Times is a member of both organizations and supports the proposed legislation.) However, it's been vehemently opposed by various tech industry trade groups and Facebook parent company Meta, which has gone as far as to threaten to remove all news content from Facebook and Instagram if the bill passes.

Meta has previously followed through on this threat when a similar bill was passed in Australia in February 2021 that required Google and Meta to pay journalism outlets for their content. Facebook briefly blocked publishers and users from sharing news links on its platform but restored news content days later after the Australian government agreed to make some changes to the News Media Bargaining Code.

Meta also announced June 22 that it would be pulling access to news on Facebook and Instagram in Canada after the country passed a law requiring digital platforms to pay publications for their content. Leading up to the bill's passing, the company, along with Google, had already begun testing blocking access to news links for a small percentage of Canadian users.

Meta confirmed in a statement it would move forward with removing [news content](#) for Canadians prior to the bill taking effect in six months. Google has said it will also do the same for Canadian [news](#) sites in search results.

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