

# Media groups urge feds to investigate after Google limits California news in search results

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Two journalism trade organizations representing thousands of publishers this week called on California Attorney General Rob Bonta, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to investigate

Google, after the tech giant [announced](#) that it was pulling California news articles from its search platforms for some users.

Google's actions were in response to a bill being considered by the state Legislature that would require platforms such as Google and Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, to pay news publishers for content they link to.

The California News Publishers Association and the News/Media Alliance—two leading news industry advocacy groups that lobby on issues related to [press freedom](#) and government transparency—argued in a letter sent Tuesday that it is possible that Google violated both state and federal antitrust and unfair competition laws.

"Importantly, Google released no further details on how many Californians will be affected, how the Californians who will be denied news access were chosen, what publications will be affected, how long the compelled news blackouts will persist, or whether access will be blocked entirely or just to content Google particularly disfavors," the letter said.

"Because of these unknowns, there are many ways Google's unilateral decision to turn off access to news websites for Californians could violate California laws."

Google Vice President for Global News Partnerships Jaffer Zaidi said in a blog post last week that Google's decision was in response to the California Journalism Preservation Act, also known as Assembly Bill 886. The move was an escalation in the company's opposition to the bill, which has not yet become law but has already sparked debate over who would benefit, and whether restricting access to [news content](#) might inhibit democracy.

Google issued a statement via email Wednesday pushing back against the industry groups.

"These baseless claims deflect the real issues with CJPA—this bill is unworkable and will hurt small, local publishers to benefit large, out-of-state hedge funds," said Brianna Duff, Google spokeswoman.

"We have proposed reasonable alternatives to CJPA that would increase our support for the California news ecosystem and support Californians' access to news. We've long said CJPA isn't the right approach, and we've taken a responsible and transparent step to prepare for its possible implementation."

AB 886 passed the California Assembly last year but stalled in the Senate. It currently sits in the Senate Judiciary Committee without a scheduled hearing.

Zaidi said that the bill would impose a "link tax" and that such a policy would be unworkable for the company.

McClatchy—which owns The Sacramento Bee, The Fresno Bee, The Modesto Bee, the San Luis Obispo Tribune and the Merced Sun-Star—supports AB 886.

Billie McConkey, McClatchy's chief administrative officer, said in a statement last week that Google's response "is typical of how the dominant tech platforms have responded. They would rather block citizens' access to essential information than simply pay fair market value for the content from which they profit."

The Bee has reached out to Bonta's office for comment.

When asked by a reporter Tuesday about Google's move to take down

news links to California publishers, Gov. Gavin Newsom responded:  
"We're in conversations with the company you referenced. Let's leave it  
at that."

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