Overly broad privacy regulations are the latest threat to news publishers, and California presents the newest challenge.

The California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) seeks to give consumers more control of their personal data. However, while the goals of the law are laudable, the CCPA has the potential to simultaneously cripple many news organizations and cut off consumers from high-quality journalism.

Privacy has always been important to those in the news business — from protecting readers’ information to guarding the privacy of whistleblowers and anonymous sources. Publishers also value their relationships with their readers, which involves obtaining and protecting their data while serving them advertising.

The CCPA attempts to uphold these values, but as written, the law could prohibit newspapers from sharing data in any meaningful way with advertisers. Once consumers click on a “Do Not Sell” button, publishers would not be able to serve them ads alongside their content, the revenue from which is currently reinvested in delivering quality journalism. The quid pro quo of the internet will be forever altered and the ecosystem that news publishers and consumers have come to rely on, for better or worse, will suddenly evaporate.

Were changes needed to the legal system to ensure consumers’ ability to disseminate and withhold their personal data at their will is preserved? Yes. But the unintended consequences on the economy by the CCPA must be considered and thoroughly explored before newspapers must begin to comply with it on January 1, 2020.

If this overly blunt law becomes operative without amendments before legislature adjourns on September 13, our current advertising ecosystem will be completely altered overnight, and many local newspapers may not survive the abrupt transition. On the positive side, the law seeks to put the control back in the hands of users, as well as reward quality content that advertisers and consumers can trust and rely on – these are values that are at the core of our mission. But as it is currently written, there is no flexibility built in to permit trusted sources to serve consumers advertising. Without such flexibility, there will be no quality content left, and a dominant few will hold all of the data within their walled networks.

California legislators need to clarify in the CCPA that quality advertising from specific trusted sources, such as news publishers, will be permitted under the new rules. Doing so will ensure news publishers’ continued ability to inform Californians on important issues in the community, without undermining the overarching goals of the CCPA. The CCPA was designed to rein in the bad actors across the online ecosystem. News publishers respect and value our readers’ data and provide vital services to our communities; they are not the intended targets of this law.

Consumers’ need for data protection, and publishers’ need for financial security to be able to provide quality news, are not mutually exclusive. Together, we can work to fix this critical oversight in the law and help ensure the citizens of California feel their data is protected, while continuing to receive the high-quality, dependable journalism in which they trust.