
March 16, 2015 HB 2237 Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

The current system of communicating public notices isn't broken but will be shattered beyond recognition if HB 2237 is allowed to see the light of day.

More than 20 years of study still concludes that the public wants public notices published in newspapers where they are most likely to see them and share the information with others. HB 2237 will greatly diminish the public's right to know. The public has been trained for decades to look for public notices in newspapers and its various platforms. Retraining the public can be slow-going; timeliness is a vital part of public notices.

The internet may be a popular choice for many activities but it has proven time and time again to be an unreliable source of information, as well as one that is highly vulnerable to hacking and other malicious activity. Despite how unstopably influential digital media is today, it cannot do what newspapers are doing, which is serving the public daily. The public depends on an open and free press to monitor and report on what is happening in their communities and public notices are part of that reporting foundation.

Newspapers cannot be changed, altered, or mysteriously "go down". When a public notice is published in a newspaper it is guaranteed as fact by a sworn affidavit from the publisher. Once committed to ink, the notice becomes a part of history that is admissible as fact in a court of law.

The internet has no rules of law to follow and no method of authenticating exactly when a public notice was posted, who was responsible for the posting and if the entire notice was posted as originally written.

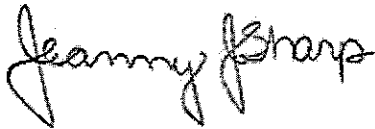
The supposed costs savings for municipalities in HB 2237 may look good on paper but they simply do not add up. Government workers cry every day that they are overworked. It's unlikely there's an underworked person on staff at every municipality, school, city, county and state office who easily could take on the additional work of posting public notices to an official website. Public notices do not write themselves, nor do they keyboard, proof read, and offer proof of publication. It takes at least one person to do those necessary steps and in some cases several people. The supposed cost savings would be negated by the need to hire additional government workers to accomplish the task that newspapers already perform daily. It's important to note that many rural municipalities, such as water and fire districts, do not have any actual employees, only volunteers and elected non-paid board members.

Who would develop this public notice website? Who will maintain it and its integrity and security? Who will update the postings? Who will train workers to properly input the notices? Who will make sure the information is posted correctly? HB 2237 calls to create a centralized website that would contain massive amounts of data and have thousands of workers inputting more data daily. A website of that magnitude requires some brilliant designers and programmers in order for it not to fail. Let's just say it could be another Affordable Care Act debacle.

Newspapers are the public's watchdog for government. In this day of transparency, integrity and high ethical standards lawmakers should welcome the scrutiny, not muzzle it. In the case of many small newspapers HB 2237 wouldn't just muzzle, it would literally pull their teeth, creating such huge revenue deficits many would be forced out of business. Newspapers haven't asked for a government bailout. We believe we have earned our stripes and will continue to earn them. We are beholden only to the public we serve. Government should follow the example and stop trying to micromanage our business models.

"If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter." Thomas Jefferson.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanny Sharp". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Jeanny" and the last name "Sharp" clearly distinguishable.

Jeanny Sharp,
Editor and publisher