

Your Community, Your News, Your Hometown Paper
The Lincoln County News
Locally Owned, Printed and Published in Lincoln County – Since 1875

February 28, 2023

Testimony on L.D. 422 “An Act to Eliminate the Requirement That Municipalities
Provide Public Notice in Newspapers”

Dear Chairs Nangle and Stover, and distinguished members of the State and Local
Government Committee,

Please accept this written testimony as it was not possible to attend this
afternoon’s public hearing.

Public notices are essential for government transparency. They are the critical
first step for those interested in knowing what is happening in their community.

I would encourage the committee members to vote ought not to pass on this
legislation.

The responsibility to post public notices in an open and transparent way falls on
local government officials. There should be a system of checks and balances to
ensure notices are posted with adequate time and done correctly. This is currently
accomplished through publishing in newspapers. This proposed bill would remove
that requirement without offering an alternative.

Across much of the state, individual involvement in local government has been
decreasing. With fewer people getting involved in local governments, the electorate
has fewer choices. By removing the requirement that public notices run in
newspapers, this trend will likely continue.

When we are interviewing candidates for reporter positions at our paper who
are not familiar with how municipalities conduct business in Maine, we explain that
the town meeting is one of the truest forms of democracy that exists. Many are
surprised when we explain how the governing body, consisting of the townspeople,
holds an open discussion and decides the fate of each article as an assembly. This
does not exist in other parts of the country, and we should all take steps to protect
this local form of government.

According to the UN’s website, several items were declared essential elements
of democracy including the holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal
suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people; the
separation of powers; transparency and accountability in public administration; and
free, independent and pluralistic media.

Your Community, Your News, Your Hometown Paper
The Lincoln County News
Locally Owned, Printed and Published in Lincoln County – Since 1875

Public notices express when elections will be held and provide a level of transparency into the public administration. A free and independent media will ensure notices are made accurately and timely to help ensure separation of powers exist. L.D. 422, as written, would erode some of these basic tenants of democracy and may lead to less trust in local government.

Through the Maine Press Association, our newspaper has been a steadfast proponent of ensuring public notices for the towns that we serve are placed on our website as well as mainenotices.com. This is in addition to printing them in a section of our weekly paper. This exposure is far greater than any of the municipal governments would garner through their own websites.

We all lose when public notices become less accessible. Failing to publish these notices in newspapers will result in less attention, less oversight, and less involvement from the citizens.

Please note nothing in this testimony has addressed the impact to community newspapers at a time when approximately 25% of the newspapers in the United States have closed in the last 17 years.

I urge you to vote against this bill to support a more transparent process for local governments, and protect the current public notice law.

Sincerely,

John Roberts, Fifth Generation Publisher of The Lincoln County News