



March 2, 2023

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Lisa DeSisto and I am CEO of Masthead Maine. We are comprised of six dailies newspapers, 17 weekly newspapers and a commercial printing facility. We are locally owned by Reade Brower. I also serve as the publisher of the Portland Press Herald, the state's largest daily newspaper and I am a former president of the Maine Press Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here in opposition to LD 422, An Act to Eliminate the Requirement That Municipalities Provide Public Notice in Newspapers.

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This is not my first time before the State and Local Government Committee defending the requirement to publish public notices in newspapers. Each time, the newspaper industry has come together to provide testimony on how the public would be negatively impacted if notices were no longer required to be published in print. While we may compete for news stories, we are united in our belief that the public is entitled to broad distribution of public notices.

Our business is built on putting vital, local information in front of as many people as possible. That's not the objective of municipal websites. By removing the requirement to publish notices in print, far fewer people will see them. Most likely, notices would only be seen by a small number of people who would actively seek them out.

By keeping the requirement to post notices in newspapers, notices are put in front of our daily readers both in print and online. Here's a terrific example of how placing notices in papers reaches a passive audience – folks who didn't actively seek out a notice but instead come across them when reading the paper. When the notice printed about this hearing, three different people reached out to me to be sure I knew about it. One person from an ad agency, another a former journalist and the third our commercial printing salesperson.

I can assure you that none of these three readers would have found the notice on a municipality's website. If the goal is to have the notices read, they've got to be in a place where people will see them.

The point has been made about Maine's older, rural population who don't have reliable broadband access or desire or means to access information electronically. We shouldn't diminish Maine seniors' access to public notices.

In past testimony, we haven't focused on the financial importance of public notices to newspapers. But in 2023, as we work to find a long-term path for sustainability for newspapers, I must tell you that public notices are a critical revenue source. The loss of local newspapers and journalism jobs across the country has been well documented. News deserts are sprouting up in community after community where no local newspaper exists to serve local readers. We are fortunate in Maine to have locally owned newspapers that are driven by our mission to deliver local journalism. The loss of public notices revenue would be a financial blow and our ability to serve readers would suffer.

Newspapers are vital to keep communities informed and engaged. It's our responsibility to keep public notices in front of our readers both in print and on our well-visited websites. We hope you agree with our reasoning and vote against LD 422.