

MAINE TRUST

—for Local News—

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO LD 2042

An Act to Eliminate the Requirement for Municipalities to
Provide Public Notice in a Newspaper
Maine State and Local Government Committee
January 21, 2026

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. Good morning.

My name is Stefanie Manning, and I am the Publisher of the Maine Trust for Local News, which employs over 300 Mainers and publishes the *Portland Press Herald*, *Lewiston Sun Journal*, *Kennebec Journal*, *Morning Sentinel*, *Times Record*, and other weekly newspapers across western Maine. In that capacity and as a member of the board of the Maine Press Association – we oppose LD 2042.

I want to start with a number: 22,400.

That's how many times readers clicked from our newspaper websites to mainepublicnotices.com in 2025. Not by accident—by design. We ran 4.8 million digital ad impressions promoting public notices, placed links in our navigation menus, and built tracking systems so we could measure engagement and be accountable for it.

And this is just our newspaper group. The *Bangor Daily News* and other Maine papers are doing the same.

I want to be clear about the effect of LD 2042. It replaces an established, public-facing notice system with a fragmented approach that significantly reduces visibility.

Right now, when a town posts a notice about a zoning hearing, a foreclosure, or a tax lien, that notice runs in print and is actively promoted through a coordinated digital network. Our websites alone generated 44 million visits last year—significantly more than maine.gov's 29 million. We don't just host notices. We drive people to them.

Municipal websites don't have that reach. And under this bill, 482 municipalities would each be responsible for managing notices on their own. It's important to recognize that managing public notices requires time, expertise, and consistency. Under LD 2042, municipalities would be expected to take on that responsibility individually, with widely varying levels of capacity and support.

There is also an equity issue. Fifteen percent of Maine households have no internet access, and that gap is not evenly distributed. Thirty-nine percent of households earning under \$20,000 have no internet at all.

Now consider who public notices affect most: foreclosures, zoning changes, public assistance hearings, tax liens. These disproportionately impact lower-income residents—the same residents least likely to have reliable internet access. A system that relies solely on municipal websites assumes access that simply does not exist.

There's another critical point: independence and accountability. Newspapers are independent of government. We verify compliance, provide affidavits, and archive notices permanently. If a required notice doesn't run, we catch it.

Under this bill, who's checking? If a notice is missed or posted incorrectly, who holds the government accountable? Transparency cuts both ways.

I'll close with this: We're not defending an outdated system. We're defending working infrastructure, with data to prove it.

4.8 million promotional impressions.

More than 22,000 engaged users online alone, in addition to the over 4.7 million copies of printed newspapers we distributed with legal notices in 2025.

LD 2042 dismantles that infrastructure and replaces it with nothing. It's our readers and your constituents who would be left in the dark.

I urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass. I am available for any questions that you may have.

Thank you.

Delivered by Stefanie Manning, Publisher
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LD 2042 Public Hearing 1.21.26

Testimony by Stefanie Manning, Publisher

Key Data at a Glance

- **22,400 clicks** from newspaper websites to **mainepublicnotices.com** in 2025
- Over **4.7 million newspapers** delivered with public notices
- **4.8 million digital ad impressions** promoting public notices
- **44 million annual visits** to participating newspaper websites
- **29 million annual visits** to **maine.gov**
- **482 municipalities** affected under LD 2042
- **15% of Maine households** lack internet access
- **39% of households** earning under **\$20,000** lack internet access

How Public Notices Work Today

- Public notices run in print and are actively promoted online
- Newspapers: Place prominent links in navigation menus; Run sustained digital ad campaigns; Track engagement and report results
- Notices are centralized, searchable, archived permanently, and independently verified

Result: Notices are not just posted—they are **seen**.

What LD 2042 Does

- Eliminates the newspaper-based public notice system
- Shifts responsibility to **individual municipal websites**
- Requires **482 municipalities** to manage notices independently

What LD 2042 Does Not Do

- Does **not** eliminate the cost of public notices
- Does **not** replace existing infrastructure with a statewide alternative
- Does **not** ensure consistent reach, promotion, or accountability

Reach & Visibility Concerns

- Newspaper websites collectively reach **far more users** than state government sites
- Municipal websites: Do not have comparable traffic; Do not run coordinated promotion; Vary widely in technical capacity and staffing

Posting is not the same as public access.

Equity Impacts

- **15% of Maine households** lack internet access
- **39% of households earning under \$20,000** lack internet access
- Public notices most often involve foreclosures, zoning changes, tax liens, public assistance hearings

These issues disproportionately affect lower-income residents—the same residents least likely to have reliable internet access.

Accountability & Independence

- Newspapers are **independent of government**
- They verify compliance, provide affidavits, maintain permanent archives, catch errors or missed notices

Under LD 2042:

- No independent verification
- No uniform compliance check
- No external accountability if notices are missed or posted incorrectly

Bottom Line

- The current system is **modern, measurable, and working**
- LD 2042 dismantles proven infrastructure, reduces visibility and equity, weakens accountability, replaces a statewide system with fragmented local responsibility

Final Recommendation: Vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 2042