

Midcoast Villager

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Testimony in Opposition to LD 2042: “An Act to Eliminate the Requirement for Municipalities to Provide Public Notice in a Newspaper”

Thank you, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the State and Local Government Committee, for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to LD 2042.

As a career political journalist, I am scrupulously careful to avoid expressing personal political opinions, even to close friends or strangers I will likely never see again. So I never imagined testifying on a piece of legislation. But this issue is important enough to overcome my hesitation, because public notices are a foundational element of transparent, responsive government, and newspapers remain the most effective and equitable way to ensure those notices actually reach the public.

I am the deputy editor of the *Midcoast Villager*, a weekly newspaper serving Knox and Waldo counties that launched in 2024 through the merger of four historic papers. One way we’ve tried to revitalize the local news business model is by opening a cafe in the same building as our newsroom in Camden where residents can meet directly with reporters and editors. Every Friday morning, I host an open, drop-in meeting with readers called Fresh Brewed News. There is no agenda beyond listening.

One of the most consistent things I hear at those meetings surprised me: Many readers still rely almost entirely on the print newspaper. They do not go online often, if at all, and trust the newspaper because it is familiar, impartial and reliable. Maine is, after all, the oldest state in the country.

Public notices are meant to inform all residents, not just those who are digitally fluent and organized enough to regularly check an often difficult to navigate webpage. For time-strapped parents of young children like me, staying informed is hard enough as is, let alone if we have to add checking our town’s website every week to make sure we don’t miss something important.

Online postings can be backdated, edited after publication or buried and then quietly disappeared. And the mere possibility that deceit is possible will inevitably invite speculation and conspiracy theorizing.

When published in independent newspapers, public notices are subject to fixed deadlines and editorial standards. They cannot be quietly edited, moved, or removed. And they become part of the permanent public record, preserved at local libraries in perpetuity. That independence is not incidental; it is essential. Newspapers also provide context. Notices appear alongside reporting, letters and opinion columns that explain what's at stake and how to participate.

This concern is not hypothetical. In 2022, Florida became the first state to eliminate its newspaper public notice requirement. A recent [academic study](#) of the impact found a decrease in citizen awareness and a decline in public meeting attendance. Researchers saw no meaningful increase in traffic to counties' public notice websites, suggesting no one was reading them there. Their conclusion was clear: removing newspaper notices reduced citizen engagement.

Before coming to the *Midcoast Villager*, I spent 15 years covering national politics in Washington, D.C. and traveling to more than 40 states on assignment for NBC News. Last year, I took a significant pay cut to work in local news because I believe this is where journalism is most vital — where trust in news can be rebuilt from the ground up because we can and must be more responsive, transparent and accountable than our national colleagues. Public notices serve those same goals for local governments.

An informed populace is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy and a substantial body of research shows that strong local journalism improves civic engagement, increases voter participation and reduces corruption. Removing public notices from newspapers does not modernize transparency. It makes transparency easier to overlook—and easier to evade.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose LD 2042 and preserve the role newspapers have played in ensuring open, accessible, and accountable local government since before the American Revolution. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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