

Senator Baldacci, Rep Matlack, Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Roberta Manter, and I live in Fayette. I am here to ask you to vote L.D. 876 "Ought Not to Pass." I do understand Senator Breen's concerns, and she makes some good arguments. However, there's a large sector of Maine's population that does not have reliable internet access.

I live off grid, but I do have a phone line. My internet speed for both upload and download is often less than one megabit per second. It's rarely more than 2.75 for download speed or more than 0.75 for upload. But I consider myself lucky. My daughter has NO internet service at her home. She doesn't own a computer, because there's no point. A couple of years ago she was given an ipad, but she has to go out to somewhere that has WiFi in order to get online. The same goes for everyone who lives on her road in Bridgton. (Not all of Cumberland County is in Portland!)

There are large sections of our state where this is the case. I see this bill as being discriminatory against much of Maine's rural population.

But even where there is GOOD internet access, I see this bill as discriminatory against our elderly population, many of whom are not computer literate. Those seniors who do use the internet are likely to be familiar with a few sites that they use regularly, but surfing the net to see what's happening is not part of their routine. My own husband is a pro at locating used tractor parts online, but don't ask him to use the computer to read the local news. Many seniors find computer screens hard on the eyes, so they limit their computer use as much as possible.

Moreover, I see this bill as suggesting posting notices where hardly anyone will ever see them. When someone picks up a newspaper, they're likely to scan through that one document to see if there's anything of interest. Even at that, they may still miss a notice if they're not expecting one. But when you go online, you will not see what's posted on the town or county website unless you go to that town or county website. How many of you here can honestly say that you check your own town's and your own county's website daily or even weekly to see if there might be a notice that concerns you? I know I don't, and I don't know of anyone else who does. I do subscribe to a mailing list that gets me an email with the Selectmen's Meeting agenda - I know my neighbors do not - but even that would not alert me to notices on the town website.

Senator Breen mentioned the alternative of checking at the Town Office for notices, while she also argued that people don't want to go out to get the newspaper. In the past, many have depended on seeing notices posted prominently in public places - at the town office, general store, etc. But with COVID, people aren't going out and about as much. Our senior population in particular is sticking closer to home, and so is less likely to see such postings.

We need MORE transparency in government, not less. I agree that fewer people are reading their daily newspaper these days, but switching to an even less noticed platform will not improve the situation. I'd object less if this bill required posting notices BOTH in the local newspapers AND on the town's or county's website as well as in prominent places in town. That would increase the chances that members of the public will actually see the notice one way or another. But posting notices online and not in the local paper will effectively make those notices inaccessible to many of our citizens, and not very likely to be seen by the rest. Please vote LD 876 "Ought Not to Pass."