



Sen. Nangle, Rep. Stover, members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Jody Jalbert, and I am the Publisher of the Sun Journal and six weekly newspapers in western Maine, the Vice President of Sales for the Kennebec Journal and Morning Sentinel and a board member for the Maine Press Association.

I am here today to speak in opposition to LD 422, An Act to Eliminate the Requirement That Municipalities Provide Public Notice in Newspapers

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Public notices are required for open and transparent government. The duty to post public notices in an open manner falls on local government officials. This system requires a counterbalance to ensure notices are posted correctly and with ample time. Newspapers have been the traditional source for public notice since their inception because newspapers provide accessibility to the public, independence from government and the ability to provide verification and archiving.

LD 422 as proposed assumes every Mainer has reliable internet service as well as the skills needed to navigate the web, but many Mainers do not. Significant numbers of people in rural areas still lack internet access and those who are older than 65, have lower incomes or lack high school diplomas are also cut off from the internet in far higher numbers than the average.

Our newspapers know firsthand the challenges people in small towns and rural Maine face with internet access and lack of skills necessary to follow along in the digital world. In March of 2020 our newspapers started to publish our Monday editions only in epaper format on our websites. When the announcement of the change was made public, we quickly heard from the many people across our readership areas who are without proper internet access, computer

equipment or the ability needed to read our newspapers online. The number of folks who shared their concerns and challenges was staggering but it solidified the role we hold in our communities and the responsibility we bear to ensure our readers are delivered the information necessary to make informed decisions for their families and communities. It was made clear, small rural communities still very much rely on their local newspaper for news and information. Our newspapers run public notices on the days we publish print editions, Tuesday through Sunday, to ensure all our readers have access to the vital information needed to make informed decisions. Also, every public notice that runs in our newspapers are also easily accessible on our websites as well as mainenotices.com

An initiative to publish legal notices online as a single option for access across a multitude of municipal websites creates an unnecessary burden and deprives many Mainers of public access to government. Public notices provide transparency about how a municipality is spending taxpayer dollars and ensure credibility, credibility that will be greatly reduced if the municipality is posting information about its activities on its own government website. Having an independent, non-governmental monitor as part of the public notice process protects peoples' interests and newspapers serve that role.

If municipalities are allowed to post their public notices only on their government websites, transparency will be lost and if public notices are removed from newspapers, people will know a whole lot less about what's happening in their local government. And for that LD 422 should not earn your support. Thank you for your time.