

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1030

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COUNTY AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: April 20, 2021 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Toni Rowan, Publisher
Northeast Texas Publishing
Mount Pleasant, TX

Dear House County Affairs Committee members,

Newspapers are still regarded as the most trusted source for reliable information in their respective communities, especially the smaller more rural ones.

Our readers depend on us for accuracy and fact based journalism. Additionally, in our small towns, a good majority of our readership do not have access and/or the ability to navigate the internet. Likewise if they did, how would they even know where to find the information?

These readers are your constituents and they deserve to be informed by their long time trusted printed paper for local government proceedings as well as legal notices that they very well may have a vested interest in.

These are your voters, neighbors, and friends that trust you to represent and protect their best interests.

As a leader of 3 small community newspapers, my livelihood as well as the livelihood of my employees, very much depends on our sustained revenue streams. It's no secret that removing legal notice revenue would certainly threaten the survival of some of our longstanding newspapers.

I urge you to consider these facts as you deliberate and debate in your upcoming hearings. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

--

Toni Rowan
Publisher
Mount Pleasant Tribune
Pittsburg Gazette
Steel Country Bee

office: 903-572-1705

cell: 901-574-2663

Tara Huff, Publisher
Eagle Press
Fritch, TX

Removing notifications from the community newspapers will do harm not just to an essential business, the paper, but also to the community. The readership of the community papers are the citizens who strive to be informed by facts and not by the whim of the internet. They are voters, citizens who try to remain informed on the local and state government (as well as national). Through their local paper they know that notices are easily accessible for them to read and that any important information will be there.

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Removing them will take away that consistent, available and expected avenue for the public. We are here to serve the public and the public has for years relied on us to do so. It would be a detrimental act to remove the gold standard public notices from the community papers.

Ken Esten Cooke, Publisher
Fredericksburg Publishing Company
Fredericksburg, TX

Here we go again. Alternative media has no greater reach - and often far less - than the traditional general circulation newspaper. But let's not just call newspaper companies simply a "newspaper" any more - we are media companies and publish on a variety of mediums - and are far more widely read than the percentage of persons who "like" a social media page (of which about 6% see all posts). This saves nothing for the governmental agency posting the legal notice, and does a disservice to citizens by "hiding" these from view on an obscure social media post or a governmental website.

As the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." General circulation newspapers and their associated digital products are the gold standard of public notice.

Also, newspaper readers are our most civically engaged citizens. For almost two centuries, Texans have looked to general circulation newspapers for important information on government actions that impact their lives.

Public notices in newspapers are a cornerstone of government transparency and accountability. The more eyeballs on a public notice, the better. In today's polarized political climate we need more notice, not less. Eliminating notices from general circulation newspapers would foster toxic distrust of government. It's also a bit Orwellian to expect that free citizens are going to wake up and check their governmental website each morning. But people do check their newspapers, websites, e-editions, email newsletters and more, all published by the local "newspaper."

Newspapers act as a neutral third-party publisher, and they certify and archive the notices. That newspaper record - a certified, PRINTED record like the one many lawmakers want for the ballots cast in every election - makes it impossible to alter the record of what was published and when. AND digital copies of public notices from Texas newspapers are aggregated by the Texas Press Association. Citizens can sign up for "push" notifications about specific matters of interest to them, either by region or statewide. A similar effort by a national newspaper organization was begun just this week.

By law, newspapers must charge their lowest advertised classified rate for public notices. The amount of money that a governmental entity spends on newspaper notices is infinitesimally small compared to its total budget. Claiming this is a financial burden to governmental entities is simply untrue. It would be far more costly, defending lawsuits for one, to let governmental agencies "hide" these notices among so much digital noise that is online.

Newspapers are an essential part of the identity of a community. Don't further local citizens by making them less informed of what is going on with their governments.

Elaine Kolodziej, Publisher
Wilson County News
Floresville, TX

For those who sincerely believe in transparency, community newspapers are the way to go for publishing public notices. Considering the alternatives, newspapers are permanent records, both in print and digitally. Their archives are available and searchable, whereas social media is a conglomeration of people who may or may not care about their community. Social media has no searchable archives and tends to attract those with only a cursory interest in what happens in government. Subscribers to community newspapers tend to care about the future of their community and vote accordingly. Newspapers build community; social media feeds into a broader narrative and does not provide the glue that brings a community together. Perhaps some elected officials would just as soon not have newspaper reporters following their every action, taxpayers deserve to know what they are doing.

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Dennis Wade
Coastal Bend Publishing
Portland, TX

Readers, who are voters, have long held that community newspapers are the place where they get trusted information that impacts their lives and that includes public notices.

Newspapers are very effective and efficient delivering messages, especially in a trusted environment.

Newspapers have been and still are vitally important to the identity and success of communities they serve.

John Bowers, Mr
Aransas Pass Progress/Ingleside Index
Aransas Pass, TX

Newspapers are the only way some population has to see public notices. They do not have internet or social platforms.

David Day, Owner
The Post Newspaper of Galveston County
Texas City, TX

Please keep all legal notice with The Post Newspaper of Galveston County. We publish good positive hyper local news twice each week. It is expensive to produce and distribute our newspaper twice a week all over Galveston County. We run a lot of legal notices because our price is very affordable over the large daily papers. To lose legal notices would hurt our business significantly and maybe cause to close our newspaper. PLEASE HELP US. Thank you.

Julia Childs
The Post Dispatch
Post,, TX

Public notices in newspapers are a cornerstone of government transparency and accountability. The more eyeballs on a public notice, the better. In today's polarized political climate we need more notice, not less. Eliminating notices from general circulation newspapers would foster toxic distrust of government.

Paige Wright
The Menard News
Menard, TX

Greetings- I publish a small weekly newspaper in Menard. As a sole provider of print media in our area, I can attest to the need to keep public notices in the local newspapers. We are the only source of local information to our loyal readers, who still enjoy their physical news PAPER. Many of our readers are older citizens who would not see pertinent information in any digital media; they simply don't access it. While I totally understand the logistics of this bill for larger, daily newspapers, it's just does not fit for us smaller markets. We, like many local newspapers, have enjoyed a resurgence in readership in the past year or so. All the feedback we get is positive- grateful for a place to have local news available, and thanking us for hanging in there during the tough times. I've also noticed that the most civic-minded citizens who would most utilize public notices are almost always newspaper readers/subscribers. In short- taking away printed public notices would be detrimental to not just our business, but for many others like us, who serve a valued community role. It would also keep public information out of sight for many of our readers. I urge you to look further into this as far as small, community newspapers are concerned. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

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I appreciate your time,
Paige Wright
Publisher
The Menard News

Cindy Terrell
Lexington Leader
Lexington, TX

16 April 2021

Dear Sirs:

It has come to my attention that next Tuesday the House County Affairs Committee will consider HB 1030 by Rep. Matt Shaheen, another terrible bill that could eliminate public notices in community newspapers.

I am greatly concerned about this for a number of reasons, the main one being that public notices are intended to make citizens aware of governmental actions and intent. People still read newspapers and trust them to keep them aware of what the government is doing, which includes information provided in public notices seen in their local newspaper, especially in smaller rural communities, such as the one I serve. Eliminating the publishing of notices in newspapers such as ours would effectively disenfranchise those people from civic involvement.

The newspaper public notice is still a bargain that works well in print. Our Legislators need to know that I consider a vote to eliminate newspaper notices to be a vote against my community, my readership and me personally.

Please, don't let this bill get out of committee. I'm counting on you.

God Bless,
Cindy Terrell, Editor/Publisher
Lexington Leader
P O Box 547
Lexington, TX 78947
979-773-3022

Jon Awbrey
DeLeon Free Press
DeLeon, TX

This topic continues to be pushed by representatives who know literally nothing about older, rural communities in Texas. As a newspaper publisher and owner, obviously there is some financial interest on my part in opposing these bills. However, I don't charge enough for it to make or break me in anyway, so my financial interest is very much a secondary consideration in this debate. I would say this... there is no alternative media in rural Texas for older residents. Half don't have a computer or a smart phone. More than half don't use social media of any kind. These statistics are easy to find and verify. Also many rural residents don't have a water bill because they use well water. So, again, these bills leave fifty percent of the largest voting cohort in these rural counties completely in the dark. And, if you want a solution to solve a big expense in large cities, then use some form of smaller paper that charges less for public notices. Simple simple. But the fact is, the local newspaper is the only media for seniors and many other rural residents. Why would you, as the elected representatives of those voters, be supportive of leaving them in the dark on something as simple as a tax hike? You shouldn't be, and it is shameful if you are.

Phil Major, publisher
Wood County Monitor
Mineola, TX

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Recently an out-of-town company had a public notice published in the newspaper concerning an air quality permit application. Were it not for this public notice, required to be published in the local newspaper, local citizens and local officials likely would not have known that a concrete batch plant was planning to locate near the entrance of the Mineola Nature Preserve, one of the gems of East Texas. Had this notice been hidden away on some government website or in a limited distribution publication or on social media that many citizens ignore, it is highly unlikely local folks would have been able to mount the ultimately-successful campaign to try to stop this egregious event from occurring. It should also be pointed out that studies have consistently shown newspaper readers to be more active and engaged in their communities, and to vote. Also, how many local residents still do not have internet access in rural areas like ours, whether it be through lack of good broadband, or for economics reasons, and therefore unable to access such notices online. It would almost seem that government is not interested in having public notices to truly remain public, or to be published by a consistent third party well-versed in the various requirements. Incidentally, our public notices are already published on a statewide site through the Texas Press Association as well as on our own website. Thank you for your time.

Timothy Fleischer

self

Salado, TX

This is terrible public policy. Public notices promote and protect the public interest. In my 35 years experience as a community journalist, I can unequivocally say that newspapers are where public notices should be placed, not on social media pages run by the governing body (although they can be posted there as well), not in free classified advertisers or shopping guides (although the governing entity can certainly add that as an avenue), and certainly not in a homeowners association newsletter. Newspapers are publications of record. School districts, counties and municipalities each year name the newspaper of record as an act of public disclosure. They are then bound to use that newspaper to make the public notices required by the state so that the public knows where it can go to reliably find what the government has in store. Doing away with this will not damage the newspaper industry. However, it will allow the governing entities to hide their business from the public. Keep public notices in newspapers and keep requiring local governing bodies to announce their newspapers of record on an annual basis so that the light of open government can continue to shine.

Max Kabat

Big Bend Sentinel

Marfa, TX

Local journalism is shown to increase civic engagement. It's where communities come together to get informed, especially in rural areas. The rise of digital and social media has shown us that not all you read online is true. Local journalism in newspapers is the last bastion of engaging and informing our public and our democracy. It's not a nice to have. It's essential. Without it, and the public notices that go in it, you leave room for unchecked city and county government. These notices stand for transparency and accountability and are the basis of an effective government. It's a relationship as old as time and should stay that way.

Marlon Hanson

Focus Daily News

DESOTO, TX

- 1) Eliminating legal notices would provide a means for governments to "hide" plans for certain projects for which they do not want a lot of public input. I remember instances when officials would discretely ask (with a wink and a nod) "what are the days when you have the smallest circulation." They didn't want people to know about what they were considering, but still wanted to be able to point to the fact they put out a notice and fulfilled their duty to the public. Eliminating legal notices from the sources people have relied on finding them for their entire lives would make it possible for agencies to effectively hide notices.
- 2) The cost of such notices is governed by public bidding and is statistically an extremely small part of the budget of any municipality or school, but is important in keeping the public informed. When people want to know anything about a community, it is the local newspaper they call.
- 3) A large number of citizens are still not completely in the digital age. They would not see notices should they not be in the

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printed newspaper they have always relied on for such notices. The printed newspaper provides citizens with a means to see what will happen in the future due to the publication of the public notice. They can then attend a city council or school board meeting carrying the notice with them so they can voice their opinion on the planned project. Even the technologically adept will usually carry a paper boarding pass to the airport because electronic notices vanish from their phones every few seconds with their screen vanishing just as they get to security. Imagine being at a city meeting, getting up to speak, and your reference material going black on the screen.

4). With major media controlled by very few huge corporations, their credibility is often questioned as "fake news." The credibility of small local newspapers that citizens rely on for school news, city council news, sporting activities their children participate in and local events such as those put on by civic groups is viewed as "gospel."

5). Legislators voting to not make such news available as it has been for hundreds of years would be seen as a way to prevent citizens from being informed about their community. Surveys say government officials are already viewed unfavorably. This would be another way to erode trust and respect that used to be a reason such officials were referred to as "the honorable" when speaking their name. Eliminating legal notices would only make the general distrust of officials grow.

6). Legislators should be looking at ways to provide more ways for citizens to read their public notices, rather than less. From the days of Ben Franklin forward, local news has been the most important factor in maintaining credibility in any community. As the pandemic and changes in the economy have chipped away at local newspaper sources of revenue, every means possible must be engaged to ensure that local newspapers not only survive, but thrive

Roger Galle, owner/publisher

Hillsboro Reporter

Hillsboro, TX

The Hillsboro Reporter newspaper, a 3rd generation small market newspaper, is an essential part of the identity of Hillsboro and Hill County. That's why newspapers were included as "essential businesses" during the pandemic. Public notice revenue helps keep your newspaper alive to serve your community. A bill that kills newspaper notice can kill newspapers, and that would be horrendous for the communities they faithfully serve.

Shane Lance

Quanah Tribune-Chief

Quanah, TX

Newspapers are essential for spreading the news in Texas. Our small, local newspaper is counted on by everyone in our community. We have an aging community and readership. A large percentage do not even own a computer or smart phone. They read the local newspaper. By taking away legal ads, you would be taking away a way for those readers to see the notices. It would also be recorded in print in the newspaper instead of digital. Our system has worked for 200 years and there is no need to change a system that works.

Bradley Wilkerson, Editor

The Comanche Chief, Inc.

Coamanche, TX

General circulation newspapers and their associated digital products are an extremely important standard of public notice. Other local media and social media can't match the total readership Texas papers offer.

Public notices in newspapers are a cornerstone of government transparency and accountability. The more eyeballs on a public notice, the better. In today's polarized political climate we need more notice, not less. Eliminating notices from general circulation newspapers would foster toxic distrust of government.

Newspapers act as a neutral third-party publisher, and they certify and archive the notices. That newspaper record - a certified, PRINTED record like the one many lawmakers want for the ballots cast in every election - makes it impossible to alter the record of what was published and when.

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By law, newspapers must charge their lowest advertised classified rate for public notices. The amount of money that a governmental entity spends on newspaper notices is infinitesimally small compared to its total budget.

Newspapers are an essential part of the identity of a community. That's why newspapers were included as "essential businesses" during the pandemic. Public notice revenue helps keep your newspaper alive to serve your community. A bill that kills newspaper notice can kill newspapers, and that would be bad news for the communities they faithfully serve. General circulation newspapers and their associated digital products are the gold standard of public notice. Other local media can't match the total readership Texas papers offer.

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Newspaper readers are our most civically engaged citizens. For almost two centuries, Texans have looked to general circulation newspapers for important information on government actions that impact their lives. In today's fractured media landscape, print and digital notices from general circulation newspapers are still the best way to get the word out.

Patrick Dorsey

Self and business, Publisher, Austin American-Statesman

AUSTIN, TX

For almost 200 years newspapers have been the go-to place for Texans to look for public notices. This is a critical independent 3rd party check on what our government is doing and how their actions impact our citizens. The use of "alternative media" will drastically reduce the effectiveness of Public Notice as governments push for the lowest common denominator when notifying citizens what they are up to - and how Texans are impacted. The end result of this bill would be to drastically reduce the audience that will see these notices and essentially hide them from the citizens the notices are meant to protect. This service is already being done quite efficiently by newspapers where they appear in print and online at individual sites as well as a statewide aggregation site www.texaslegalnotices.com. Government agencies can already take this extra step voluntarily - in addition to the core responsibility to place in newspapers where Texans expect them and go to find them. HB 1030 should be rejected. Please vote no.

Chad Engbrock, Publisher

C&S Media Publications; Farmersville Times, Murphy Monitor, Princeton Herald, Sachse News, Wylie News (Collin County)

Wylie, TX

Chairman Coleman and members of the County Affairs Committee:

HB 1030 is not in the best interest the citizens of Texas and I oppose the bill by Rep. Shaheen.

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Sincerely,

Chad Engbrock, Publisher

C&S Media Publications (csmediatexas.com)

Farmersville Times (farmersvilletimes.com)

Murphy Monitor (murphymonitor.com)

Princeton Herald (princetonherald.com)

Sachse News (sachsenews.com)

Wylie News (wylieenews.com)

Nathaniel Rodriguez

Gannett- Texas

Sherman, TX

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Karran Westerman, Publisher

Zapata County News

Zapata, TX

It seems to me when you look at the advertisements compared to other advertising in the paper, this is a small drop in a bucket; also that some Public Notices are wanting to be hidden; not everyone has a computer, I get many calls to look up Public Notices. It will put the small newspapers out of business; I guess they would rather have the staff on unemployment than be able to give the news out. The paper that this bill was citing was less than 1% of their advertising. I believe we have better issues to deal with that need help.