



TESTIMONY
of the
CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPALITIES
to the
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Mandate Newspaper Publication of Notices

March 10, 2010

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 93% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to testify before you on issues of concern to towns and cities.

CCM supports R.B. 5031, "An Act Reducing Costs to Municipalities", and R.B. 5255, "An Act Concerning Municipal Mandate Relief." Contained in these bills are proposals that would relieve towns and cities from the mandate to pay exorbitant fees by having to post certain notices in newspapers.

The M.O.R.E. Commission recommends relieving municipalities of the requirement to post notices of meetings on the Internet. However, it does not address the more costly mandate for newspaper publication of legal and other notices.

While CCM appreciates the M.O.R.E. Commission's attention to that mandate, the more costly – and unnecessary – unfunded state mandate concerns legal and other notice postings.

Newspaper Notices & the 21st Century

Town and City Halls are the central hub of any community in Connecticut. They are the clearinghouse of information and activities for all things local -- from schedules of concerts on the green, to town meetings, to lost and found items. Residents of all ages rely on their most accountable level of government, their hometown, to keep them informed.

In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent and cost-effective way to get local information to the most amounts of residents is via the internet. It is no secret that the Internet is where people shop, communicate, do their banking, and share general information. Municipal websites have become a critical lifeline that link living rooms to their town and city halls instantly. Just like the rise of local cable access stations, the Internet and municipal websites have allowed local governmental activities to emerge even further into the public spotlight. Despite these obvious advances, in 2010, Connecticut's hometowns are mandated to legally post their notices in the back pages of printed newspapers riddled with fleeting circulations.

This state mandate suppresses local governments' visibility, protects the status quo, and serves as the state's version of a life-preserver for financially failing newspapers, all at local taxpayers' expense. It is estimated that this 20th century law costs small towns several thousands of dollars annually, while the costs to larger cities can be as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

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Times have changed, technology has changed, and so to have the habits and practices of our population. The experience in rural Goshen, Connecticut is illustrative:

The daily circulation of Goshen's local paper, the *Register Citizen* is approximately 370 residents, while the daily circulation of the region's more prominent *Waterbury Republican-American* is approximately 339 local daily readers. The amount of newspaper subscribers in town pales in comparison to the amount of actual viewers (known as 'hits') the Town of Goshen receives on its "Events Calendar" webpage, which is approximately 150,000 'hits' per year. This small town's website traffic is only a fraction of what mid-to-larger municipal websites already accommodate. It is widely recognized and accepted that Connecticut residents use their municipal websites as the primary source of information about their hometowns -- whether while at their local library, at home, or at work.

State law continues to wallow in a mire of out-dated mandates as residents demand more efficient government. Municipal websites are a one-stop shop for local schedules, initiatives, programs and services. Allowing towns to legally post online such notices as planning commissions' decisions, zoning commissions' regulations, and notifications of times and places for voter registrations would not only save municipalities money -- it would be common sense and a logical improvement to the operation of local government. Antiquated state law should not stand in the way of local governing progress.

CCM urge the Committee to remember:

- *The Internet is accessible to everyone.* All local libraries are equipped with computers at no cost to the users. Newspapers must be purchased to be read.
- *Internet sites can be accessed from anywhere in the world at any time.* Newspapers must be purchased in the region they serve.
- If a municipality already has a fully functional website with the capability of meeting the requirements of PA 08-03 of the June Special Session, then *placing such ads can be done at minimal costs – whereas placing these ads in newspapers costs in excess of \$2 million statewide every year.*
- *Public notices placed on Internet sites can remain there indefinitely*, making the information available for a greater amount of time. Notices placed in newspapers are only there for the allotted time paid for.

CCM urges you to not acquiesce to the special interests of old-guard newspaper companies. We urge you to pioneer a new era of government transparency by allowing communities to post their goings-on legally, on their websites, for the entire world to see, comment and act upon.

Local property tax dollars are not the remedy for what ails newspaper companies in Connecticut. This state mandate has out-lived its purpose and should be amended to conform to the realities of today's world.

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If you have any questions, please contact Ron Thomas or Kachina Walsh-Weaver of CCM, (203) 498-3000.