



CCM 2012 Testimony

900 CHAPEL STREET, 9th FLOOR, NEW HAVEN, CT 06510-2807 PHONE (203) 498-3000 FAX (203) 562-6314

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (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 90% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

CCM supports Souse Bill 5521 "*An Act Permitting Electronic Or Digital Methods Of Communication In Lieu Of Mailed Communications For All State, Municipal And Quasi-Public Agencies.*"

This bill would allow for making certain required notices via electronic mail, rather than through postal mail. Not only would such a proposal provide for more efficient and effective notice, it would also be a considerable cost savings with regard to printing and postage.

While considering this proposal, CCM urges you to also advance legislation that would provide a significant savings to local governments by *modifying the requirements for posting legal notices in newspapers to allow municipalities the ability to publish notice of the availability of a particular document on their website, instead of having to publish the entire document.*

Outdated Legal Notice Laws – Time to Move into the 21st Century

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, and several years of explaining this issue, in 2012, Connecticut's hometowns continue to be mandated to legally post their notices in the back pages of printed newspapers with dwindling circulations.

This state mandate hampers 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 It is estimated that this outdated law costs small towns several thousands of dollars annually, while the costs to larger cities can be as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

Times have changed, technology has changed, and so to have the habits and practices of our population.

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 permit outdated 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 local government operations.

Both the proposal contained in this bill, and CCM's proposal to modify the legal notice requirements, understand the following:

- *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.* The Connecticut Law Journal is only available through subscription and newspapers must be purchased in the region they serve.
- If a governmental entity already has a fully functional website with the capability of accomplishing such posting, *public notices on line can be done at minimal costs – whereas placing ads in newspapers alone costs municipalities 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 pioneer a new era of government transparency by expanding this bill to provide relief to local governments with regard to legal notices and allow for the electronic transmission of public notices.

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If you have any questions, please contact Kachina Walsh-Weaver, Senior Legislative Associate of CCM via email kweaver@ccm-ct.org or via phone (203) 710-9525.