



CCM 2013 Testimony

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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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 92% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

CCM supports the bills before you today that would provide significant relief from a long standing and outdated mandate on local governments by modifying the requirement to post the full text of all legal notices in local newspapers.

- Senate Bill 143 "*An Act Concerning Publication of Notice in Newspapers*"
- House Bill 5530 "*An Act Permitting the Posting of Legal Notices on Municipal Web Sites*"
- House Bill 5532 "*An Act Concerning the Publication of Legal Notices*"

Municipalities are not seeking complete repeal of the law, but rather a modification that would:

1. **Allow for publishing notice of the availability of a document in local newspapers, along with a summary and clear instructions as to how to get additional information or the complete text of the public document - municipal office where a hard copy can be obtained, a contact name and phone number that could be used to get more information, and the web address where an online version can be found.**
2. **Require newspapers to have a designated section for all such public notices to be listed, for ease of finding by the reader, along with a listing in the publications' table of contents.**

The purpose of Section 1-2 of the state statutes was to ensure the public is provided information on governmental actions and issues that may impact them. To this end, local governments spend millions of dollars every year publishing lengthy documents, in their entirety, in local publications.

The internet has become a tool widely used for the dissemination of a wide array of information on all levels. **The State itself has moved to a paperless system in similar ways** – the General Assembly several years ago stopped printing certain bills and legislative documents, and PA 12-92 shifts all proposed state agency regulations to be placed online instead of published in paper form.

It is important to keep in mind:

- 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 can only be purchased in the region they serve.
- 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.

No one is seeking to hamper the public's right to know; rather towns and cities are seeking a more cost effective and efficient manner in which to provide the information.

In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent and cost-effective way to get 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 and state websites have become a critical lifeline that link living rooms to their governments instantly*. Just like the rise of local cable access stations, the Internet and municipal/state websites have allowed governmental activities to emerge even further into the public spotlight. Despite these obvious advances, in 2013, Connecticut's hometowns continue to be mandated to post their legal notices in printed newspapers with dwindling circulations.

Newspapers have had a captive client of municipal governments for years and have taken advantage of this mandate by often charging their highest advertising rate for this service. In addition, these legal notices are used as filler throughout the paper to take up excess space – they are not placed in a coordinated manner to allow readers ease of access to the information.

Don't be mistaken, this issue is not about freedom of information for the newspapers – it is all about money. Similar to the police blotters that newspapers feel are necessary to publish, they can certainly do the same for any other documents they also feel are important enough to do so.

With the state budget again facing large deficits and municipalities bracing for cuts in state aid, now is the time for the legislature to make meaningful mandates relief for towns and cities - not to mention the fact that this can be provided at no cost to the State.

CCM urges the committee to support legislation to (1) **allow for publishing notice about the availability of a document in local newspapers**, along with a summary and clear instructions as to how to get additional information or the complete text of the public document - *municipal office where a hard copy can be obtained, a contact name and phone number that could be used to get more information, and the web address where an online version can be found* – and - (2) **require newspapers to have a designated section for all public notices** to be listed, for ease of finding by the reader, along with a **listing in the publications' table of contents**.

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If you have any questions, please contact Kachina Walsh-Weaver, State Relations Manager of CCM via email kwalsh-weaver@ccm-ct.org or via phone (203) 710-9525.