

The Madison News

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To: Kristey Williams, Chairman
House Local Government Committee
From: Tammy Seimears, Editor and Publisher
The Madison News
RE: Opposition to HB 2247 on public notice

Dear Representative Williams,

I am writing to you about the public notice bill that is being proposed in your committee and to tell you why I feel it would be a monstrous mistake to pass it.

I am the editor/publisher/reporter/everything other title of a small weekly newspaper in Greenwood County. My circulation is approximately 700 papers each week. While that may not be a large number in comparison to the bigger media newspapers, it is large to my readers. They depend on the newspaper for their information about breaking news, school functions, school board meetings, county commissioner meetings, city meetings, games, clubs, weddings, births and a myriad of other stories that thread through their daily lives including legal notices. The newspaper is a lifeline of information to most of our readers.

HB 2237 proposes to give the option for public entities to put their legal notices on their websites instead of newspapers. I believe that would do great harm to the transparency aspect of our local governments. Information that is intended *by law* to be provided to the public will indeed be more hidden than readily accessible.

A very large portion of our readers do not have access to the internet. Many are elderly and not in the generation of computer raised individuals with no ability or interest to learn how to navigate the internet airspace that can at best be intimidating to one who has never been exposed. Many are in rural areas and are unable to afford expensive satellite or fiber optic connections. Some simply choose to read the newspaper instead of surfing the net to find their information. We do not have an electronic edition, as it does not serve the needs of our demographics.

I can tell you of a recent problem that arose with our county government that illustrates the need for a newspaper publication. They are required *by law* to publish quarterly balances in all county funds so the taxpayers **are informed** of the public county funds. The clerk published instead, a small ad with a reference to the report on their website. When one went to the website, it did not display the report at all due to internal errors. They did not even know until it was brought to their attention *by the newspaper*. County commissioners recognized this as a problem and instructed the clerk to publish it in the newspaper.

This is just one example of what are many problems with giving the option to use websites as a communication vessel of crucial information. The internet is undependable, not secure and there is no way to monitor to insure that the legal information is posted in a timely manner. The internet can be hacked and information changed, as readily seen in recent huge data breaches. A newspaper is in print, not able to be altered, with legal affidavits as proof that entities

are following the law. Who is going to make sure it's done if newspapers do not provide that concrete solution? If something is challenged in law, it will be difficult if not impossible to provide the proof needed.

I realize that there is some industry concern over media reporting and inflating the news to benefit the publication. You may feel that a slap on the wrist of the newspaper industry might curb some of that. This proposed legislation will not accomplish that purpose. It will only serve to punish the small weekly papers that are the backbone of most of the areas you, as legislators, represent. Small newspapers, like many small businesses, are struggling to stay open. The Madison News is no different. If this gets approved, the economic affect could very well shut us down. What a sad event if your goal is realized to the detriment of those you represent.

Please think again about sending this bill on. Your decision is far reaching, affecting far more than just the big media. The people need to know. Keep public notices in newspapers where they will be seen.

Thank you for your time.

Tammy L. Seimears
Editor and Publisher
The Madison News