

# WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

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Feb. 16, 2017

To: Kristey Williams, chairman of the House Local Government Committee

From: Dan Thalmann, publisher of the Washington County News and Linn-Palmer Record

Re: Opposition to HB 2247 on public notice

Rep. Williams,

I am opposed to HB 2247, which would give local government entities the option to use their own internet sites to post public notices. Putting government in control of the dispersal of their own information and activities is the opposite of any effort concerned about transparency.

Having public notices published by newspapers allows for a neutral and independent party to be in charge of the dispersal of information about the government's activities. When printed in newspapers, the notice is essentially set in stone and cannot be changed. It is part of the historic record, free from editing, tampering or intentional cover-up.

I'm confused about the perceived need for this bill. Any funds saved through this idea is minimal. In the years that one of my newspapers is the official county newspaper (the county's legal publication is rotated each year to one of three newspapers in the county) the biggest expense of the year for legal publication is the delinquent tax listing. However, the county is allowed to pass on the cost of charging each delinquent taxpayer \$15 per listing to make up for the publication cost, taking away much, if not all of the expense. Local governments who would claim a move like this as a money-saving effort do not have the public interest at heart.

I've also heard supporters of online publication say this concept would reach a new generation of citizens, who "don't read newspapers." This is only partly true - demographics have changed and many young people do get their news online (often from newspaper websites,) but most newspapers have some version of internet presence where public notices can be seen online. Plus, the Kansas Press Association has invested heavily in a site "kansaspublishing.com" where all public notices are already published in an archived, searchable form. If some taxpayers want this information online, they can already find it online.

While internet usage is growing exponentially, there are still plenty of people who do not use the internet, especially for trying to find public notices. In a printed hard-copy newspaper, public notices are easy to find, and even if people aren't specifically looking for them, they often indirectly come across them as they flip through our pages, thereby securing more knowledge of government activity as a result of the newspaper format. Don't we want our citizens to be aware of our government activity? Or do we want government activity to be hidden from public view?

The principle of transparency through printed legal notices is the priority for me, but I'm also concerned about the impact this bill would have on my business. Since this has been a regular revenue source for as long as I've owned newspapers, taking legal publication revenue out of my budget would cause me to have to downsize staff. A small business like mine simply does not have the margins to absorb this change of public notice requirement.

I adamantly oppose this bill and hope your subcommittee will not recommend its passage. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dan Thalmann, publisher  
Washington County News & Linn-Palmer Record