

Title: Editorial Public notices should stay in newspapers

Author:

Size : 32 Inches Sq Shelbyville,KY Circulation: 8377

Keywords: newspaper/publisher/editor/reporter/journalism award news



Editorial

Public notices should stay in newspapers

A proposal has been offered by Rep. Jennifer Decker (R-Shelby) to remove public notices — legal advertisements — from newspapers and place them instead on individual government websites.

The bill, HB 71, would darken some of the sunshine that newspapers have fought for since Ben Franklin cranked out the Pennsylvania Gazette.

Decker said the idea, which is not a new one, was planted by Shelby County Judge-Executive Dan Ison, who said that The Sentinel-News' deadlines were his main motivation.

"Because we were on timelines, we (fiscal court) couldn't meet because of your (the newspaper's) printing timelines," Ison said.

But there's a hole in that thinking. HB 71 still requires a notice to be published — a summary that directs readers to the website for the full content. The timelines remain.

He also wishes to avoid paying for newspaper space.

While we are all for wise spending of tax dollars, we think that the premise behind published public notices is, in fact, wise spending. Published notices keep transparency out of the total control of local government. HB 71 would allow the wolves to guard the hen house. Would misuse occur? Probably not locally, but the opportunity is there. HB 71 would hinder our efforts to be government watchdogs.

Yes, legal advertisements are a source of income for newspapers, but certainly not a major source. In fact, it is a very minor expense for local governments, at best — typically less than 1 percent of the budget, according to a 2016 LRC study.

Legals are already available on the internet at NO additional cost to public agencies. As notices are published in newspapers, those are uploaded to <http://www.kypublicnotice.com/>

Legal notices on the web only would mean that people with no internet access can't see the PUBLIC notices, and some people — especially many elderly people — have difficulty in navigating the internet.

We do agree with Ison, Decker, and others that it is unfair that cities with populations of more than 80,000 are excused from the legal notice rule, as it stands. Big cities like Louisville and Lexington need published legal notices, too.