

# Planning and Development Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6556

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ONLINE PUBLICATION OF LEGAL NOTICES BY

**Title:** MUNICIPALITIES.

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/3/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Planning and Development Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

To permit municipalities to post advertisements of legal notice on their respective town, city, or borough's internet web site. The goal is to reduce costs to municipalities and increase resident access to information.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

None expressed.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**[Robert Phillips, Executive Director of NHCOC, CT Chapter of the Am Plan Assoc:](#)**

I support this proposal in the very least to ENABLE municipalities with the option to choose the medium for legal notice to reach more taxpaying citizens effectively, efficiently and at a cost more reflective of transparency in public information dissemination.

**[Donald Stein, First Selectman, Town of Barkhamsted:](#)**

Newspapers unfortunately are a dying breed in the State and the nation, and their circulation has diminished to the point that most residents get their news online from town websites, emails and social media. Please consider this very strong request which would benefit the public financially and would allow for broader distribution of the information.

**John Elsesser Town Manager, Town of Coventry:**

It's time to eliminate the outdated legal notices mandate and save towns much-needed time and money. Coventry residents are receiving information, including legal notices, on the municipal website, social media platforms, or via emails they can sign up for. Removing the print mandate will save our town approximately \$10,000 / year.

**Betsy Gara Executive Director Connecticut Council of Small Towns:**

HB-6556 will save municipalities time and money by allowing required legal notices to be posted on municipal websites instead of print newspapers. In addition to reducing costs, posting the information on municipal websites will provide residents and businesses better access to this information because the information is more easily accessible and the public has become accustomed to visiting municipal websites for information, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Charles Grant, Chair, Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG):**

It has been successfully proven that advertising to municipal websites is a viable alternative to newspaper print, and it saves municipalities thousands of dollars on print ads.

**John Guskowski, Govt. Relations Officer, CT Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA):**

Our internal surveys among municipal planners have demonstrated, municipalities frequently pay many thousands of dollars for newspaper notifications annually, with little demonstrated value. The broad consensus among the CCAPA membership is that the online posting of legal notifications is effective. Should this Bill proceed, CCAPA respectfully makes three suggestions for consideration that can be read in detail on our written testimony.

**Donna Hamzy Carroccia, CSO, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM):**

In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent, and cost-effective way to get information to the most amounts of residents are via the Internet. 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

**Tracey Hanson, First Selectman, Town of Voluntown:**

Posting legal notices online will save my taxpayers money, and it will make things easier on my boards and commissions when planning public hearings and meetings.

**Mark H. Bernacki, New Britain Town & City Clerk, and Connecticut Town Clerks Association, Legislative Committee:**

Municipalities are challenged with increasing costs, extremely tight deadlines and limited options when publishing legal notices. This bill would provide cost savings for our towns. Today's technology allows our residents to have better access to news via smartphones,

laptops, tablets and computers and these devices allow for more immediate information than ever before through our local town websites.

**Paula Cofrancesco, First Selectman, Town of Bethany:**

This bill will save municipalities time and money by allowing required legal notices to be posted on municipal websites instead of print newspapers. In addition to reducing costs, posting the information on municipal websites will provide residents and businesses better access to this information because the information is more easily accessible.

**Michael R. Criss, First Selectman, Town of Harwinton:**

This bill will save municipalities time and money by allowing required legal notices to be posted on municipal websites instead of print newspapers. In addition to reducing costs, posting the information on municipal websites will provide residents and businesses better access to this information because the information is more easily accessible, and the public has become accustomed to visiting municipal websites for information.

**Jason A. Klein, Partner, Carmody, Torrance, Sandak, & Hennessey, LLP:**

Many folks already look to their city website to find out important information regarding meeting dates, school enrollment, and other matters of local interest. For this reason and several others noted in my written testimony, I support this bill.

**Michael A. Zizka, Attorney, Halloran Sage:**

Without this bill or a bill providing similar relief, small municipalities may lose the ability to take any effective legal action, whether it be adopting budgets or ordinances, amending regulations, or deciding on land-use applications. At the very least, it would undoubtedly protect those municipalities from years of litigation and uncertainty regarding the legal status of their actions. See written testimony for details that support the brief comments above.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Mike DeLuca, Group Publisher, Hearst Connecticut Media Group, and President, Connecticut Daily Newspapers Association:**

Requiring public notices to be posted in newspapers helps ensure that the public has access to important information about government activities and decisions, and that government agencies are transparent and accountable. Newspapers are still a widely used source of information for many people, particularly those who are not as tech-savvy or who do not have access to the internet. Placing public notices in newspapers ensures that a broad cross-section of the public will have access to this critical information.

**Frederick Nevin, Publisher, Hamden Community News:**

To eliminate publication of notices in the print newspaper provides an opportunity to further reduce town government transparency at a time when more transparency is needed. This bill provides a disservice to those residents who rely on the newspaper – web site and print

editions -- for unbiased information on town government and education matters. My paper does print some notices but not nearly all the \$100,000 as stated by the mayor of Hamden.

**Reported by: Robert Mayne**

**Date: March 22, 2023**