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It's Newspapers Versus Municipalities Again

by Hugh McQuaid | Feb 1, 2013 2:59pm

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Hugh McQuaid Photo

Richard Graziano

The Hartford Courant's publisher testified before a skeptical Planning and Development Committee on Friday in opposition to two bills that would remove a requirement that towns post their legal notices in a daily newspaper.

The committee's public hearing agenda was awash with legislation opposing municipal mandates. Lawmakers took testimony on more than a dozen nearly identical bills requiring a two-thirds vote of the legislature for passage.

But it was one specific mandate that the Courant's publisher, Richard Graziano, came to argue the state keep in place — the one requiring municipalities to inform residents of some of their town's actions through their local daily newspaper. Graziano also serves as president of the Connecticut Daily Newspaper Association.

[Both bills](#) would give towns the ability to publish advertisements of their legal notices on their website. [One](#) also would give them the option of posting in a weekly newspaper.

Graziano argued against the change, saying that it was a matter of open access to government through an

objective third party. He said that posting the notice only on a government site leaves it open to tampering, alteration, political bias, or publication after the legal deadline.

“Connecticut has had its share of political ethical troubles, concerning both state and local officials. This should give the legislature pause before it enacts legislation that would make it easier to defraud the public,” he said.

But several lawmakers on the committee did not seem convinced. As Gov. Dannel P. Malloy prepares to release his second biennium budget, local governments are bracing for cuts to municipal aid.

Some lawmakers view reducing municipal mandates as an olive branch to towns and with more and more residents using the Internet, some wondered whether paying to publish legal notices in the newspaper was essentially just subsidizing the struggling newspaper industry.

Several town leaders testified in support of the bills, including New Canaan First Selectman Robert Mallozzi.

“Truly a great burden for small towns like New Canaan. Fiscal year 2012 we spent \$37,498 on these type of advertising announcements. We have local online newspapers that are extremely well-read and well-published. Their rates are much less to advertise than on their physical newspapers,” he said.

In his testimony, Graziano acknowledged the bills would hurt the bottom line of newspapers. He said it would be disingenuous not to mention it.

“The newspaper industry is retooling and adapting to an ever-changing news world and the [Connecticut Daily Newspaper Association] feels strongly that the newspapers remain the most vibrant local news gathering operations,” he said.

Though the industry is changing, much of the investigative journalism published is done by newspaper reporters and it feeds into other mediums, he said.

But lawmakers questioned Graziano on the newspaper's declining circulation as well as declining local coverage of small towns.

Rep. Melissa Ziobron is a freshman Republican who doesn't serve on the committee but proposed one of the bills. She said there are no daily newspapers in her district. She said there is a weekly newspaper that covers 13 towns in the area but few people read it.

“I can tell you the majority of my residents don't even pick it up . . . It actually becomes litter, which is very unfortunate,” she said.



Hugh McQuaid Photo

Rep. Bill Aman

Ziobron wasn't the only legislator to complain about newspapers becoming litter. Rep. Bill Aman, R-South Windsor, told Graziano he intends to introduce a bill to address it. Aman said he was more sympathetic to newspapers [two years ago](#) when the legislature also considered lifting the legal notice requirement.

But on Friday, Aman had harsher words for the Courant.

"The number of local stories in the Hartford Courant today is virtually non-existent in smaller towns. If you don't have a murder or major accident you're not going to be covered," he said, adding that events like school board meetings don't get coverage. "The newspaper of my childhood is not the newspaper of today."

Graziano defended his publication.

"I'd argue that we provide more local news than we ever have on multiple channels in the history of the Hartford Courant and I'd also ask you to realize that next year we're celebrating our 250th anniversary. The Hartford Courant is older than the United States. It is a historic property," he said.

He cautioned against putting the notices only online when 25 percent of Americans don't have access to the Internet either at home or at work.

"We should not attempt to predict which medium serves the most citizens," he said. "We should deliver this information through multiple channels."



Hugh McQuaid Photo

Rep. Jason Rojas and Sen. Steve Cassano

Sen. Steve Cassano, D-Manchester, said the solution would likely need to be a compromise, like reducing the number of times towns must post a notice or not requiring them to post whole documents.

If some towns are spending over \$100,000 a year on public notices, removing them from papers entirely would result in “some newspapers [getting] killed,” Cassano said. “We understand there has to be a balance. Clearly there has to be a reduction in multiple notices.”

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posted by: **Historian** | February 1, 2013 6:49pm



Last time I checked Ct law says the towns have to publish their notices in a newspaper “distributed” in the community, Not daily or weekly papers. Of course that includes outlandish newspapers such as the NY Times,etc. Publishing these small type, tedious annouements in the back pages of the Courant DO NOT warn people of Saybrook or Windsor of local town meetings or zoning hearings and any who so claim cannot demonstrate they do.

posted by: William Jenkins | February 3, 2013 2:12pm



It's a good idea to know the law “Historian” instead of just guessing and then making wrong statements. “Distributed” is not used in the statute as you claim and a weekly newspaper is acceptable.

The statute is 1-2 and here's what it says:

“Sec. 1-2. Legal notices. Each provision of the general statutes, the special acts or the charter of any town, city or borough which requires the insertion of an advertisement of a legal notice in a daily newspaper shall be construed to permit such advertisement to be inserted in a weekly newspaper; but this section shall not be construed to reduce or otherwise affect the time required by law for giving such notice. Whenever notice of any action or other proceeding is required to be given by publication in a newspaper, either by statute or order of court, the newspaper selected for that purpose, unless otherwise expressly prescribed, shall be one having a substantial circulation in the town in which at least one of the parties, for whose benefit such notice is given, resides.”

posted by: dano860 | February 4, 2013 9:36am



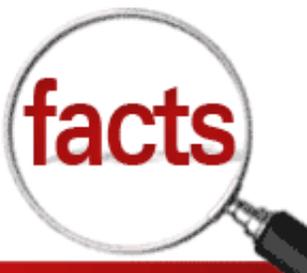
Bill, I think it's time to revise that statute. With the age of electronic communication, Town web sites and public notification of meetings for those that sign up using a “newspaper” (bad news only) is going the way of the buggy whip.

This a is a last ditch effort for the paper to maintain their last grasp on an outdated regulation. It's sort of like the Post Office, they depend on junk mail to remain solvent, if that's what you call being bailed out by the Feds all of the time.

As you know the few people in any given town that care and attend meetings know exactly where to go for this information. The rest of them are just sideline gossips.

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