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Legislation would cut back on legal notices

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Posted: Saturday, March 30, 2013 12:29 pm

By Ed Jacovino Journal Inquirer | **1 comment**

HARTFORD -- Newspapers are opposing a proposal that would limit public access to information about town meetings, hearings, and other government activities.

Starting Monday, daily newspapers in the state will publish advertisements informing voters about the plan to limit the publishing of legal notices.

The notices, which are advertisements paid by towns, are required by law to inform residents of municipal meetings, public hearings, contracts, and proposed ordinance changes.

"Everyone understands that town budgets are hurting. However, closing off access to what these towns and cities are doing is no cure for what ails them," Chris VanDeHoef, a lobbyist for the Connecticut Daily Newspaper Association, said. "Ridding themselves of third-party verification, archiving, and oversight is simply a recipe for trouble."

The newspapers, including the Journal Inquirer, will publish full-page advertisements urging people to call legislative leaders and the governor's office to oppose the move.

A bill that is gaining momentum in the General Assembly would allow towns to publish a summary of the legal notice in a paper, and then include with that summary a reference to a government Internet site that would have the full legal notice.

The measure passed the Planning and Development Committee this month in a 16-3 vote on March 22. This week it passed the Government Administration and Elections Committee in a unanimous vote.

Municipal leaders are pushing the measure. Betsy Gara, a lobbyist for the Connecticut Conference of Small Towns, said towns spend between \$5,000 and \$35,000 each on legal notices each year.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities told lawmakers that putting the notices online would expand access to them, rather than limit it.

"In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent, and cost-effective way to get information to the greatest number of residents is the Internet," the group wrote.

Both groups asked the legislature to end published legal notices outright and instead require them to be posted

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only on the Internet.

Newspaper executives contend the change limits open access to government. Not everyone has access to the Internet, and those who do seldom visit government websites anyway, they say.

Michael Killian, vice president of the Meriden Record-Journal, testified before lawmakers on behalf of the newspaper association.

"Public notices are an important tool in assuring an informed citizenry," he said. "That's why they are called 'public' notices; not 'town' notices. They were mandated to make sure there is a public window into the activities of government, officers of the court, and anyone else holding a public trust."

Sen. Stephen T. Cassano, D-Manchester, has referred to the legislation as a compromise because the cities and towns want to eliminate all published notices. Cassano is co-chairman of the Planning and Development Committee and the former mayor of Manchester.

But VanDeHoef, the newspapers' lobbyist, said that while lawmakers offered the proposal as a compromise last year, the newspapers never agreed to it.

During debate on the bill this week, members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee -- which often calls itself the "good government committee" -- said the proposal is about helping towns.

"This is a fair balance," Sen. Michael A. McLachlan, R-Danbury, said. "Municipalities have told us that they're spending incredible amounts of money in the costs of legal notices."

Rep. Ed Jutila, D-East Lyme and the committee's co-chairman, agreed.

"We've all heard a lot from the towns about trying to reduce some of the mandates that are costly to them, and I would see this as one small step in that direction," he said.

Rep. Matthew Lesser, D-Middletown, supported the bill but said he had concerns about whether residents could read a public notice in a newspaper and correctly type an Internet address into a computer. He questioned whether lawmakers could require the Internet address to be short or simple.



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Honor Rolls

Thursday 04/04/2013

Independent schools

Posted: April 04, 2013

These north-central Connecticut students have been named to honor rolls at independent schools in the region.

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Wednesday 04/03/2013

Bennet Academy

Posted: April 03, 2013

MANCHESTER — These students were named to the second-trimester honor roll at Bennet Academy.

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Stafford Middle School

Posted: April 03, 2013

STAFFORD — These students were named to the fourth-term honor roll at Stafford Middle School.

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Tuesday 04/02/2013

Ellington High School

Posted: April 02, 2013

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Posted in [Page one](#) on *Saturday, March 30, 2013 12:29 pm.*

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ELLINGTON — These students were named to the second-quarter honor roll at Ellington High School.

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Friday 03/29/2013

Loomis Chaffee School

Updated: March 29, 2013 - 9:28 am

WINDSOR — These students from area towns were named to the Loomis Chaffee School's honor roll for the winter term.

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UPaul posted at 7:21 am on Wed, Apr 3, 2013.

Posts: 0

When I moved into Broad Brook in 1971, we had a place for legal notices to be posted. This was in front of the Broad Brook Hotel and was available for view 24/7. This was maintained by the town clerk and was the place to find out what was going on. These items were also placed in the newspaper(s) for all to see. The state legislature allowed for the outdoor, public posting to be moved indoors. In East Windsor, this is inside the town clerk's office. That means that the visibility for free is now restricted to the hours that the town hall is open. In the 1980s I missed a legal notice about the last day for paying taxes. I got burned for a late fee. That is when I subscribed to the JI so that would not happen again. Many of the legal notices are about zoning applications. These applicants pay a fee to apply and that is where the cost of the paid posting comes from. We MUST keep the legal notices in print as a minimum, the internet as a convenience for some. The legislature would be better off repesling most of our laws and allowing people to live their lives again without excessively complex rules.

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Calendar

April 2013						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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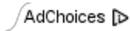
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Neil Caron of South Windsor carefully wraps grape vines around the trellis at the Blake Vineyard in South Windsor on Saturday. About 20 volunteers gathered to trim back the grape vines and prepare them for the growing season. The private vineyard was started by Caron's neighbor John Blake in 1999. Neil started helping Blake with maintaining it in 2003 and took over the winery when Blake passed away in 2008. Caron

produces roughly 850 bottles of wine per season, all of which he donates or gives away. The Blake Vineyards have played host to events ranging from weddings for friends and family, to a charity farm dinner in 2011 which raised funds for the Wood Memorial Library.
(Jared Ramsdell / Journal Inquirer)

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