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Organized Labor Joins Newspaper Opposition To Online Public Notice Bill AB642Like  7Tweet  3 0

The California Federation of Labor, one of California's largest organized labor groups, earlier this week submitted a letter to Assembly Judiciary Chairman Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont) declaring its opposition to AB 642 by Assemblyman Anthony Rendon (D-Bell) which would allow an Internet-only entity to become a newspaper of general circulation to publish public notices.

The California Newspaper Guild is part of the California Federation of Labor. The Teamsters have indicated they may also submit a letter in opposition to the bill, which is sponsored by Patch/AOL.

The Assembly Judiciary Committee has not yet set a hearing date for AB 642, although it is likely that the bill will be heard at the committee's May 7 meeting to comply with the legislature's deadline for hearing non-fiscal bills.

CNPA governmental affairs staff urges all members to continue to register their opposition to AB 642 with the author and each Assembly Judiciary Committee member by letter, by phone call and by personal visit.

Why AB 642 is bad:

The criteria used to establish an internet-only entity to be the official newspaper for a community is so weak it would allow any blogger or hobbyist with a laptop, tablet or smart phone to qualify.

AB 642, by its terms, would allow aggregators and scrapers, bloggers and hobbyists to qualify as the community's official newspaper.

AB 642 requires no brick-and-mortar presence, no business office, and therefore, likely no local publisher, editors, local ad staff, no production or circulation staff. A single "regional editor" aggregating content from the worldwide web and rewriting news created at great expense by real newspapers would qualify.

Because no physical presence is required in the community, AB 642 will move jobs out of California; not only is there no need for local publishers, editors, reporters, production and circulation staff, the public notice ad takers the internet-only entity does need can be regionalized in call centers out of state (Texas) or out of country (India) or at the New York headquarters of the bill's sponsor, AOL.

AB 642 requires no "substantial paid circulation" in the community — an important factor establishing a newspaper has made a substantial investment in the community and is likely to work hard to make it pay off — and substitutes this criterion with the incredibly weak "substantial regular readership" which the bill allows to be established from anywhere in the world with no guidance about how a court would establish the requirement has been met. A weekly kitty video could do it, who knows?

Moves published and distributed public notices from a proven, reliable method of delivery to an uncertain, experimental system requiring the public to identify, seek and find public notices.

Internet-only public notices are undependable, have no permanency; are subject to change; and susceptible to technological failure. Internet connections fail, servers crash, links die and web sites are hacked.

Digital divide issues persist.

The Internet is a seek-and-find technology. Newspapers are a "push technology" dependably pushing millions of printed, published and distributed public notices into millions of households and businesses every day.

Printed and distributed public notices are archivable.

Printed and distributed public notices are secure from hackers.

AB 642 would allow the adjudication of a petri dish. Deflecting rumors AOL was going to pull the plug on Patch or at least recreate it to operate without humans, sponsor AOL has admitted it continues to experiment with Patch sites. From an AOL spokesman: "We test different models in an effort to best serve our existing communities, and our future ones."

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