

An editorial: Public notice bills threaten citizens' right to know

Citizens' right to know about government is being endangered by several bills in the General Assembly that would take public notices out of newspapers and allow them to be published on government-controlled websites.

As the law stands now, local governmental bodies are required to publish notices about public hearings, rezonings, requests for proposals, elections and other matters of public concern as advertisements in paid-circulation newspapers in the community. Public notices help citizens learn about plans and actions that will affect them and their community.

If these bills were approved, however, boards of supervisors and town councils would no longer have to publish notices in the local newspaper. Instead, they could post them on government websites, which few people ever visit. In fact, more than half of the U.S. population say they have never reviewed a local, state or federal website, according to the Public Notice Resource Center.

Of course, nothing is wrong with posting public notices on government websites, but that shouldn't be citizens' only way of learning about what government is doing, nor should government control the public notice process. Talk about the fox guarding the henhouse.

And let's not forget that not everyone uses or even has access to a computer or the Internet. These people would, in effect, be disenfranchised if public notices were only posted on the web.

Newspapers are readily available and accessible to everyone. We also offer an independent, impartial source of information that is not under government control.

Please help us continue to keep you informed. Write to your legislators and let them know you are against government removing public notices from newspapers.