

## Public Information: Worth noticing

Have you ever heard of eVa? Chances are you haven't. It's an electronic procurement website run by the state's Department of General Services, and for people in the rarefied world of government contracting, it might be a big deal. But it's hardly the sort of information source most folks think to check on a daily basis.

Nevertheless, a bill before the General Assembly would allow local governments in Virginia to post procurement notices only on the eVa site — bypassing local newspapers, where they traditionally have run. It's one of several efforts this year to hide the public's business from members of the public.

Commendably, lawmakers have rejected several of the measures. But this one — HB 1193 — has passed the House. Its financial consequences extend far beyond newspapers that carry the notices. Fewer eyes on the notices means fewer bids for the contracts. That could end up hurting small businesses and forcing higher costs onto the taxpayers. It also could lessen the scrutiny of civic watchdog groups that is so essential to keeping government honest.

On Monday, the state Senate's Committee on General Laws and Technology will take it up. Sen. Frank Ruff (698-7515) chairs the committee. We urge you to contact his office and let him know that public notices about public information should be kept in local newspapers where they have a chance to be seen by the public — not tucked away on obscure websites where they are largely hidden from view.