

Va. legislators should say no to government secrecy

Other Views

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As expected, several bills designed to cloak the actions of local government in secrecy have now been introduced at the General Assembly. The bills would abandon the requirement that public notices of government actions be printed in local newspapers, and allow them to be buried deep in the bowels of obscure websites.

So far, the measures to keep public notices from actually getting noticed by the public include: HB222, sponsored by Del. Chris Head of Roanoke;

HB234, sponsored by Del. John Cosgrove of Chesapeake;

HB623, sponsored by Del. Mark Cole of Fredericksburg;

HB773, sponsored by Del. Steven Landes of Augusta;

HB812, sponsored by Del. Joe May of Leesburg (this bill refers to the Department of Historic Resources).

We have explained at length why these measures, penny wise but pound foolish (and all sponsored by Republicans) would dangerously erode the public's right to know and violate principles of good, open government (see last week's editorial, "Into Darkness" and publisher Tom Silvestri's September column "Newspapers Protect Public's Right to Know About Government").

Some of the bills above have been sent to the House Courts of Justice committee; the rest have not yet been assigned. Courts of Justice is chaired by Del. David Albo. The other members are: Terry Kilgore, Rob Bell, Benjamin Cline, Sal Iaquinto, Todd Gilbert, Jackson Miller, Manoli Loupassi, Ronald Villanueva, Greg Habeeb, Matthew Farrell, Randy Minchew, Richard Morris, Joseph Johnson, Vivian Watts, David Toscano, Charniele Herring and Jennifer McClellan.

You can track the bills' status at <http://lis.virginia.gov/>. The bills' sponsors, as well as the Courts of Justice committee members and all other state legislators, can be reached by phone or email; find their contact information on the main legislative website, <http://legis.virginia.gov/>.

We urge the sponsors of these measures to withdraw them — and the committee members to spike them if the sponsors do not. We hope you will, too.