



MASSACHUSETTS NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

PUBLIC NOTICES IN NEWSPAPERS: PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS

Publishing public notices is not as simple as posting an item to a website. Newspapers have a proven record of accuracy and reliability in publishing public notices, dating back to the earliest days of our nation.

- I. Public notices must be published by a neutral and independent party. Only newspapers can ensure this.**
 - a. Allowing the government to post public notices on its own takes away third-party neutral oversight and removes all independent proof of publication.
 - b. Placing the responsibility of notifying the public in the hands of government officials carries a potential for abuse.
 - c. Newspapers serve as watchdogs for the community. If a scheduled public notice is not published or contains false information, newspapers are likely to catch the omission or mistake.

- II. Public notices must be easily accessible to all segments of the public. Only newspapers can ensure this.**
 - a. If public notices appear exclusively online, then those who have little or no access to the Internet and little skill in using it – the elderly, the poor, minorities and those who live in rural areas – will be disenfranchised.
 - b. The government has a fundamental responsibility to ensure adequate public notice of its actions. That responsibility cannot be abdicated in favor of presumed cost savings.
 - c. Local newspapers are the established medium for public notices. They are where the public expects to find them.
 - d. Although the number of Americans who use the Internet is growing, most still use it primarily for e-mail. Only a small fraction routinely visit government websites. Far more Americans read newspapers. In fact, even though newspaper advertising is down, newspaper readership is at an all-time high.

- e. Allowing individual government entities to publish notices on their own websites would create a confusing maze of public-notice locations. Finding them would require search skills that many people lack. Newspapers provide readers a single, convenient location in which to find public notices.

III. Public notices must be archived in a secure and accessible format. Only newspapers can guarantee this.

- a. The Internet does not provide a reliable archival history of public notices. Entire years' worth of notices could be accidentally deleted with the touch of a single button or wiped clean by a hacker.
- b. The stability of newspapers as a medium for public notices is unquestionable. The Internet, on the other hand, remains highly vulnerable and unstable, with even established giants such as Google suffering data losses.
- c. Hacker attacks, worms and viruses make online notices vulnerable. Printed public notices provide a permanent record of public notices that cannot be altered.

IV. The act of publishing a notice must be verified and authenticated by the publisher. Newspapers are best situated to do this.

- a. Newspapers serve an important monitoring function. If government becomes the exclusive publisher of its own notices, it would be much more difficult for the community to monitor compliance and accuracy.
- b. With Internet publication, interested parties cannot prove whether they were properly notified of an impending action. Newspapers serve as verifiable records of publication; sworn affidavits and hard-copy tearsheets provide undeniable proof of an ad's publication.

V. Notices published exclusively online reduce government transparency and undermine public trust in government.

- a. Public notices serve to maintain government transparency, and hence public confidence in the government. If the public is not properly notified of the activities of state and local government, its trust and confidence in the government will be seriously undermined.

VI. The cost of maintaining the notices online will cancel or outweigh any anticipated savings.

- a. The costs of creating and maintaining a reliable public notices website is expensive. The site must be designed, programmed, tested and put into operation. Once running, it then must be regularly staffed, maintained and

backed up. Highly secure, onsite hardware will be required as well as off-site back-up and redundancy. Whatever minor savings governments might see by not publishing notices in newspapers would be cancelled out or even dwarfed by the expense of publishing them online.

VII. Removing public notices from newspapers would be a blow to the state's economy and employment rates.

- a. The newspaper industry is a vital component of the state's economy. Through their editorial, sales, production, printing and technology operations, newspapers employ thousands of people in cities and towns throughout the state. Through advertising, they help drive the health and growth of other businesses in their communities.
- b. Recent reductions in advertising sales have already forced newspapers to trim operations, reduce staff and make other cutbacks. Over the last three years, many newspapers have seen one-third to one-half of their traditional advertising disappear. This is due partly to the recession and partly to the rapid growth of competition from Internet advertising such as Craigslist, which rides "free" on a medium developed and subsidized by our tax dollars.
- c. Public notice advertising accounts for millions of dollars in revenue each year for Massachusetts newspapers. If public notice ads are taken out of newspapers, the impact on the economy would be huge. Elimination of these ads would lead to significant job losses at almost all newspapers and would very likely cause the death of some of the smaller daily and weekly newspapers that are central to the vitality of their communities.

Newspapers play a unique and time-tested role in publishing public notice advertising. To remove these ads from newspapers would be to undermine accountability, reduce transparency, and weaken the economy.