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Right to know is worth 9 cents per Hoosier

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State Sen. Susan Glick, a Republican from LaGrange County, wants to preserve the rights of Hoosiers to know what their government is doing, as well as their ease of keeping track.

That's why she wrote a bill in the state Legislature to continue the publication of local government budgets in newspapers through at least 2020.

The practice of publishing budgets is scheduled to end next year. In 2014, the Legislature passed a bill saying local governments and school districts can post their budgets on the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance website — and that's all they have to do.

"There are a lot of people who are just not able to use a computer to the extent that they can find the information on the Department of Local Government Finance website," Glick said.

The end of publishing notices is likely to result in a lot fewer Hoosiers knowing what is going on. That worries Glick.

Apparently, it did not worry her colleagues in the Indiana Senate last week. Glick was able to get a committee to advance her bill on a 10-0 vote, but only by watering it down.

In its original version, her bill would have required government agencies and school districts to publish their budgets in newspapers. When the committee got through with it, the bill merely said they have the option to do so.

Glick went along with the change to make sure her bill would survive so it can be considered by the full Senate and House of Representatives. She hopes she can revive its original language as the process continues.

The main argument against her bill is cost. According to the Indiana Legislative Services Agency, her bill would result in spending \$427,000 to publish all the legal notices for 2,600 units of government.

"That figures out to less than 9 cents per adult Hoosier, statewide," Glick said. "I just think that's the cost of democracy. If we err, let's err on the side of giving too much information."

Even if her bill remains in its weakened state, it would have some value. It would

give clear permission for government agencies to publish their budgets if they choose to do so.

You might think that if local agencies aren't required to publish their budgets next year, no one will do it. But Glick said some school and local government officials told her they intend to keep on publishing, whatever happens.

"They feel it's the only effective way to get the information in front of the public," she said.

A survey by American Opinion Research found that 79 percent of adult Hoosiers read a newspaper every week — more than 3.8 million people — and 61 percent of Hoosiers have read legal notices.

In contrast, the state website where budgets will be posted averages 2,258 unique visits per month, according to a voters' group that supports Glick's goals. This newspaper's website alone receives 45 times that number of unique visits.

We hope Glick's colleagues will support her bill as she originally wrote it. For democracy to work, voters need easy access to good information.

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