



March 15, 2010

TO: Senator Stillman, Representative Spallone
Members of the Government Administration & Elections Committee

RE: **SB 365** “*An Act Concerning the Posting of Public Agency Minutes and Legal Notices on the Internet Web Site of a Municipality*”

As you screen bills for action by the Government Administration and Elections Committee, **CCM urges you to support SB 365** - which would relieve towns and cities from the mandate to pay exorbitant fees for posting certain notices in newspapers and **provide mandate relief to local governments in excess of \$2 million statewide.**

The M.O.R.E. Commission recommends relieving municipalities of the requirement to post notices of meetings on the Internet. However, it does not address the more costly mandate for newspaper publication of legal and other notices.

While CCM appreciates the M.O.R.E. Commission’s attention to that mandate, the more costly – and unnecessary – unfunded state mandate concerns legal and other notice postings.

Newspaper Notices & the 21st Century

Town and City Halls are the central hub of any community in Connecticut. They are the clearinghouse of information and activities for all things local -- from schedules of concerts on the green, to town meetings, to lost and found items. Residents of all ages rely on their most accountable level of government, their hometown, to keep them informed.

In the 21st century, the quickest, most transparent and cost-effective way to get local information to the most amounts of residents is via the internet. It is no secret that the Internet is where people shop, communicate, do their banking, and share general information. Municipal websites have become a critical lifeline that link living rooms to their town and city halls instantly. Just like the rise of local cable access stations, the Internet and municipal websites have allowed local governmental activities to emerge even further into the public spotlight. Despite these obvious advances, in 2010, Connecticut’s hometowns are mandated to legally post their notices in the back pages of printed newspapers riddled with fleeting circulations.

This state mandate suppresses local governments' visibility, protects the status quo, and serves as the state's version of a life-preserver for financially failing newspapers, all at local taxpayers' expense. It is estimated that this 20th century law costs small towns several thousands of dollars annually, while the costs to larger cities can be as much as hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

Times have changed, technology has changed, and so to have the habits and practices of our population. The experience in rural Goshen, Connecticut is illustrative:

The daily circulation of Goshen's local paper, the *Register Citizen* is approximately 370 residents, while the daily circulation of the region's more prominent *Waterbury Republican-American* is approximately 339 local daily readers. The amount of newspaper subscribers in town pales in comparison to the amount of actual viewers (known as 'hits') the Town of Goshen receives on its "Events Calendar" webpage, which is approximately 150,000 'hits' per year. This small town's website traffic is only a fraction of what mid-to-larger municipal websites already accommodate. It is widely recognized and accepted that Connecticut residents use their municipal websites as the primary source of information about their hometowns -- whether while at their local library, at home, or at work.

State law continues to wallow in a mire of out-dated mandates as residents demand more efficient government. Municipal websites are a one-stop shop for local schedules, initiatives, programs and services. Allowing towns to legally post online such notices as planning commissions' decisions, zoning commissions' regulations, and notifications of times and places for voter registrations would not only save municipalities money -- it would be common sense and a logically improvement to the operation of local government. Antiquated state law should not stand in the way of local governing progress.

CCM urge the Committee to remember:

- ***The Internet is accessible to everyone.*** All local libraries are equipped with computers at no cost to the users. Newspapers must be purchased to be read.
- ***Internet sites can be accessed from anywhere in the world at any time.*** Newspapers must be purchased in the region they serve.
- If a municipality already has a fully functional website with the capability of meeting the requirements of PA 08-03 of the June Special Session, then ***placing such ads can be done at minimal costs – whereas placing these ads in newspapers costs in excess of \$2 million statewide every year.***
- ***Public notices placed on Internet sites can remain there indefinitely,*** making the information available for a greater amount of time. Notices placed in newspapers are only there for the allotted time paid for.

CCM urges you to not acquiesce to the special interests of old-guard newspaper companies. We urge you to pioneer a new era of government transparency by allowing communities to post their goings-on legally, on their websites, for the entire world to see, comment and act upon.

Local property tax dollars are not the remedy for what ails newspaper companies in Connecticut. This state mandate has out-lived its purpose and should be amended to conform to the realities of today's world.

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If you should have any questions, please contact Kachina Walsh-Weaver,
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	Cost of Legal Notices	
Municipality	<u>FY 08-09 (Actual)</u>	<u>Budget for FY 09-10</u>
Barkhamsted	\$ 2,056	\$ 4,500
Berlin	\$ 26,337	\$ 31,000
Bethany	\$ 8,668	\$ 11,224
Branford	\$ 1,850	
Bristol	\$ 34,400	\$ 37,570
Canton	\$ 7,572	\$ 11,990
Cheshire	\$ 268	\$ 900
Clinton	\$ 21,000	\$ 25,000
Colchester	\$ 9,828	\$ 10,830
Colebrook	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Coventry	\$ 15,556	\$ 18,401
Darien	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,000
Durham	\$ 9,000	\$ 9,000
East Granby	\$ 4,000	\$ 5,500
East Hampton	\$ 30,000	\$ 25,000
East Haven	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,000
Eastford	\$ 1,267	\$ 3,350
Ellington	\$ 35,770	\$ 40,000
Enfield	\$ 6,400	\$ 4,700
Farmington	\$ 25,000	
Franklin	\$ 10,854	\$ 10,000
Glastonbury	\$ 33,240	\$ 62,100
Griswold	\$ 33,033	\$ 30,360
Groton	\$ 19,287	\$ 12,290
Haddam		\$ 12,000
Harwinton	\$ 6,722	\$ 8,706
Hebron	\$ 6,000	
Kent	\$ 5,925	\$ 6,775
Killingly	\$ 50,000	
Killingworth	\$ 5,997	\$ 5,400
Litchfield	\$ 14,325	\$ 19,535
Madison	\$ 22,000	\$ 18,000
Manchester	\$ 1,300	\$ 1,000
Mansfield	\$ 5,800	\$ 5,800
Middlebury	\$ 12,000	
Milford	\$ 9,026	\$ 12,000
Morris	\$5,000-6,000	\$ 7,500
New Fairfield	\$ 500	\$ 500
New Milford	\$ 4,542	\$ 5,500
Newington	\$ 13,114	\$ 19,468

Newtown	\$ 13,000	\$ 18,000
North Haven	\$ 1,800	
Norwalk	\$ 41,164	
Norwich	\$ 12,276	\$ 17,539
Oxford	\$ 10,088	\$ 10,088
Plainville	\$ 13,500	\$ 15,000
Pomfret	\$ 8,448	\$ 5,882
Rocky Hill		\$ 18,000
Salem	\$ 10,600	\$ 6,970
Salisbury	\$ 4,978	\$ 6,000
Sherman	\$ 3,827	\$ 5,925
Somers	\$ 10,186	\$ 10,186
Southbury	\$ 13,840	\$ 17,000
Stamford	\$ 1,000	
Stonington	\$ 53,119	\$ 81,475
Tolland	\$ 25,771	\$ 24,496
Trumbull	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,500
Warren	\$ 2,598	
Waterbury	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000
Waterford	\$ 50,973	\$ 42,104
West Hartford	\$ 41,000	\$ 41,000
Wethersfield	\$ 1,800	\$ 2,500
Winchester	\$ 36,870	\$ 25,525
Wolcott	\$ 15,000	
Woodbury	\$ 600	\$ 400
Woodstock	\$ 2,844	\$ 2,070
East Hartford	\$ 12,700	\$ 6,500

TOTALS: \$ 923,619 \$ 877,059