

# EDITORIAL: Looking for a solution to a problem that doesn't exist

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It is amazing the lengths our lawmakers in Atlanta will reach to find a solution that has no problem -- all the while thinking of ideas to lower the state government's costs while increasing the local governments' costs. Such is the case of Senate Bill 186, sponsored by Sens. Bill Heath, R-Breman; John Albers, R-Roswell; Brandon Beech, R-Alpharetta; Renee Unterman, R-Buford; and Rick Jeffares, R-McDonough. This proposal would allow local governments to post legal notices online rather than in the county's legal organ. The Telegraph is the legal organ for Bibb County. Yes, local governments pay to have their legal notices published -- and it's natural that newspapers don't want to lose that revenue. However, the authors of Senate Bill 186 forgot something. Counties already have the ability they seek to give them, but this legislation puts legal requirements on the governments that do so. The lawmakers want to foist on 159 counties the cost of what is being done for free by the Georgia Press Association -- maintaining one centralized electronic billboard of all postings.

For example, Senate Bill 186 requires counties that switch to electronic postings to:

- Publish instructions for accessing the notices "in a newspaper of general circulation" monthly for a year, and then once a year thereafter.
- Governments would have to maintain the notices for 12 months after publication.
- A copy of each notice has to be maintained in a separate notice book that is indexed and maintained for public inspection. (Presently, newspapers are the permanent record of notices and when they were published without extra effort from local governments.)
- The governments would have to provide a copy of each electronic notice to the public library and Clerk of Superior Court and those records would have to be maintained for a year. (By present law, notices are provided to libraries and the clerks by the legal organ -- and records are maintained for 50 years.)

But there's more to it than the hoops local governments would have to jump through. Some of Georgia's 159 counties have no web presence and, in this state -- the largest east of the Mississippi -- there are also areas where access to the Internet is unavailable or limited. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's "Computer and Internet Use in the U.S.: 2013," Georgia, along with other Southern states have a higher percentage of homes that either do not have a computer or lack high-speed Internet access, or both. If this proposal is approved, it would also shut out many residents 65 years of age and above who have the highest percentage of homes with no computer or high-speed Internet access.

While Atlanta has a higher percentage of Internet users than the national average (78.1), most of the rest of the state is lower than the national average by 5 percent or more. There is also less access among minority communities and those communities with less education.

The bottom line of this legislative solution to a problem that does not exist is simple: Legal notices are already compiled and posted on the Georgia Press Association's Website -- GeorgiaPublicNotice.com -- free of charge. However, legal notices are also available for the cost of a subscription or the price of a single newspaper. The electronic postings require a computer, smartphone or tablet, and access to the Internet is an additional charge that can run more than \$50 monthly.

Why would lawmakers want to shut out a quarter or more of Georgians from important legal notices? We guess the present system is just too uncomplicated. With the present system already in place, all local governments have to do is place the notice, nothing else is legally required. The legal organs do the rest. Yes, too simple.

Read more here: [http://www.macon.com/2015/03/04/3616945\\_editorial-looking-for-a-solution.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy](http://www.macon.com/2015/03/04/3616945_editorial-looking-for-a-solution.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy)