

## Bill threatens transparency in local government

A bill moving through the General Assembly will risk government transparency and access to public information. We urge our legislators to oppose Senate Bill 186 and their colleagues to beware the damaging impact of this ill-advised proposal.

This legislation sheds the requirement that government entities place public notices in local newspapers, known as legal organs. Instead they will be allowed to post public notices only online, where citizens are far less likely to see them.

As it stands, the law requires local governments to publish public notices in community newspapers for good reason. These notices impart essential information about government affairs. Newspapers are consistent sources of local information, they are widely circulated, and they are independent, trustworthy watchdogs of government action and intention. They remain the best source of access to public information, even in an era of smartphones and digital technology.

Newspapers are also a permanent record. They cannot be hacked. And they are available to citizens without Internet service.

If the goal of publishing public notices is to gain access to as wide an audience as possible, burying them on a cumbersome government website isn't the right approach. Online notices also bypass an important community watchdog. If they are posted only on a government website, who will ensure that government agencies follow through and publish public notices as legally required?

Legal organs hold government accountable and eliminate the possibility of subterfuge raised by public notices posted only online.

Keep in mind also that public notices are already available online for the convenience of citizens. Legal notices from governments throughout the state, including Baldwin County, are available at the Georgia Public Notice website at [georgiapublicnotice.com](http://georgiapublicnotice.com), which is linked from our homepage. Citizens may access this site free of charge.

Legislation risking citizens' access to public notices was introduced in the Senate via committee on Monday, and it's slated for an introduction before the Senate's State and Local Governmental Operations Committee at 4 p.m. today. We urge Georgia's senators, including state Sen. Burt Jones, to put a stop to this damaging bill if and when it comes before them.