

Keep Georgia's public notices public

Oppose SB 186

Senate Bill 186, removing the requirement of government to place public notices in local newspapers, is bad legislation and will hurt the people of Georgia.

This ill-advised bill allows government to simply place notices or advertisements on a website where they are unlikely to be seen by most citizens. The proposal was introduced Monday and is on the Senate State and Local Government Committee's agenda for Wednesday at 4 p.m.

At the beginning of this legislative session, Sen. Ellis Black and Reps. Jason Shaw, John Corbett and Dexter Sharper pledged to oppose any such effort to remove the requirement on governments to publish public notices in local newspapers.

Rep. Amy Carter said she would not go “on the record” in opposing such legislation until she saw an actual bill, but she agreed that the idea did not sound good for the people of Georgia.

We expect members of our legislative delegation to keep their word.

The reason public notices are required for publication in newspapers such as this one is to make them available to as wide an audience as possible.

Keeping public notices public is no small matter. They advertise bankruptcy proceedings, adoptions, foreclosures, public hearings, tax liens, local legislative proposals, zoning changes and proposed tax increases — all things the public wants and needs to know. Burying that information on a government website would be an assault on the people of Georgia.

For one thing, it leaves to government the job of policing itself.

Newspapers have a long, important legacy of helping the public keep an eye on officeholders and agencies through news reporting and the publication of government notices.

Newspapers also serve as a historical record that will be looked upon by researchers now and years in the future. Much of that record is documented by public notices.

This legislation is impractical. It would have someone looking for a notice to know exactly what they're searching for — or what keywords to use — in order to find it on a government website. That model effectively hides the actions of government.

Making public notices available online is important. As we have reported, the state's 159 local newspapers and the Georgia Press Association have smartly moved into the digital age by creating the Georgia Public Notice website, georgiapublicnotice.com, which aggregates public notices from printed newspapers across the state. It does this at no additional cost to taxpayers. Online users may access this information for free.

We urge our delegation to bear in mind the interests of their constituents and vote “no” on Senate Bill 186 and its eventual House companion.

We urge all lawmakers to oppose this assault on the people of Georgia and protect the public’s right to know.

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Valdosta Daily Times