

Issue:

Legal Notices Modernization

Background:

Currently, local governments across Pennsylvania must publish critical meeting notices, proposed ordinances, and bids in “newspapers of general circulation.” This mandate’s intentions, while well meaning and laudable, should not be a noose around taxpayer’s necks. Why should local governments continue to place their legal notices in a medium, which by every account is losing readership every year?

New technologies such as the Internet have opened up a whole new way to inform the public on critical governmental issues. Enabling local governments to fulfill their legal notice advertising requirements by publishing them on an internet website can save much needed municipal resources.

Current Legislation:

Senate Bill 419, sponsored by Senator Robert Robbins, and **House Bill 795**, sponsored by Representative Barbara McIlvaine Smith, are two bills to allow local governments to fulfill their legal notice requirements by posting on an Internet website. Passage of these bills would amount to a savings of roughly \$23 million annually for local governments.

House Bill 677, sponsored by Representative Mario Scavello, will enable local governments to fulfill their legal notice requirements by advertising in Community Papers or shoppers. These papers have a broader circulation than traditional papers and will provide competition to bring advertising costs down.

Talking Points

- The current legal notice requirement costs of advertising in newspapers do not make sense economically. Giving local governments the **option** to post their notices on the Internet or in some other publication such as a shopper will bring about true competition, thus lower the costs for municipalities to place ads.
- **SB 419 and HB 795** are innovative ways to save the taxpayers millions of dollars without sacrificing openness or the original intent of legal notice laws.
- A 2006 study by Penn State University found the annual costs of legal notices for local governments at **\$26 million**. The same study also found that enacting legislation such as **SB 419 and HB 795** could save the taxpayers **\$23 million** annually.
- A recent Harris Poll found that four out of five U.S. adults now access the Internet.
- Many newspapers are the **ONLY** option to advertise and fulfill the legal notice requirement. This results in higher costs to municipalities.
- This bill is not mandatory, but simply gives an **option** of where to place the notice.