

Good morning Chairman Knowles, Chairman Freeman and Members of the House Local Government Committee, including Reps. Jeff Wheeland and Joe Hamm from my hometown. My name is Bob Rolley, Publisher of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette and Lock Haven Express community newspapers and web sites. I've been in the newspaper business for 40 years, starting when I was a college student delivering the newspaper to carriers. Later, I interned in the newsroom during college and cut my teeth as a reporter covering local government, business and industry, and of course Little League Baseball. It has shaped my life and compelled me to become a community volunteer and civic leader through chambers of commerce, education foundations, merchants groups and Kiwanis.

Our newspapers are proud members of the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association.

I am here today because this is critically important.

Public notices are essential to our readers ... your constituents and Pennsylvania's taxpayers.

As local newspapers delivered to homes, offices, businesses and stores, we are out there covering issues important to your constituents every day. We cover townships, borough and city councils, county commissioners, school boards and of course sporting events, businesses and what is going on in this beautiful capitol building.

We care about our local communities and our newspapers and others across the state that are working hard, promoting and supporting incredible people, events and causes and the right to know. We report the joy and happiness, the good and bad, the progress and the change. We connect people. That was never more so true than during COVID. Our readers depended on us like never before. Since many could not get out of their homes, the newspaper brought them joy and connected them to their community ... and to health-care providers, clinic, COVID test and vaccination sites.

Our online numbers were through the roof during COVID and continue to grow dramatically.

SunGazette.com, for example, is on target to achieve 20+ million page views this year. Lockhaven.com is approaching 10 million views. **ALL of our public and legal notices are placed on [www.publicnoticepa.com](http://www.publicnoticepa.com) for ALL TO READ.**

Just like our news stories tell you what is happening in your community ... so do public notices.

Giving local municipalities and school districts the option to take public notices out of print newspapers would be devastating to my two newspapers and newspapers across the state. We are a business and just like other businesses during COVID, we were hit hard. As businesses closed or slowed, it hurt our advertising sales and revenue. We had to make tough decisions. We right-sized, but we've come back strong.

But really, one of the most important arguments I can make to you is that we give local government, which spends taxpayer money to place public and legal notices in newspapers of general circulation, a return on their investment. We regularly and consistently cover local

government meetings, issues and controversies. We are dedicated to that mission and we have strong relationships with our local public servants.

**Let me give you 3 recent examples:**

- 1) Woodward Twp. in Clinton County abolished its sewer authority, not realizing it had to assume its \$2.6M debt. In doing so it maxed out the township's debt limit/borrowing capacity just when they were going to co-sign for a direly needed fire truck. Controversy swirled. The newspaper took time to cover 2 meetings and a hearing to fully explain what happened and the ramifications.  
<https://www.lockhaven.com/news/local-news/2021/04/woodward-twp-to-resurrect-sewer-authority-to-ease-debt-restriction/>
- 2) Another example is of the Williamsport Area Transportation Study committee, an important group whose sporadic meetings (they do not have a consistent schedule) we learn about through the public notices. This particular meeting had to do with hazardous roads and one in particular that is expected to include a miles-long detour for four years before it gets fixed:  
<https://www.sungazette.com/news/top-news/2020/01/transportation-planning-committee-offers-updates/>
- 3) A third example relates to a controversial school closure plan in the Jersey Shore Area School Board, which held a special meeting (one of many) that we learned about through public notice and then relayed information to our readers prior to the meeting, which we also then covered. Often times, we see these notices on the same day as a "special meeting," which in turn gives readers little notice before a meeting like this where a major decision could be made. In this instance, we saw it the day before and were able to call more attention to it. Below is the link to the notice to our readers that referenced the published public notice:  
<https://www.sungazette.com/news/top-news/2019/09/discussion-of-closure-plans-to-occur-during-special-meeting/>

We understand there is a cost to public notices, but what about transparency and information for the public? The costs that school districts, counties and municipalities pay is a fraction of their overall budgets. And we count on that revenue. If this bill passes, our two newspapers, the other five dailies in our group in Pennsylvania and other dailies and newspapers of general circulation would surely have to cut staff ... or worse.

Studies show that when local newspapers are not covering local governments, taxes go up and corruption occurs.

Public notices are just one small part of our duty to report events. Any change in our local environment can have profound consequences for us, both good and bad, depending on your viewpoint. Some of us might welcome a new recycling center down the road as it will be more convenient. Others may see the additional traffic as an unwelcome nuisance. But, whatever

your view, the important principle is that you are made aware of the proposed changes before they get the green light. That way, the pros and cons can be debated openly, and everyone is given the opportunity to have their say. Newspapers have an extremely powerful reach and a unique connection with local communities. We are at the disposal of local officials when they need to communicate with the public and we help to promote their message.

Our newspaper publishes notices in the print edition, we post on our websites, and upload to the statewide public notice website. When local officials send us public notices, we carefully review, edit and place those notices for free as a public service. In fact, we have saved local governments and school districts from publishing incorrect notices that had wrong dates or wrong information. I can't tell you how many times local governments have sent their meeting dates with last year's date. We bend over backwards for our local officials on public notices. We also recently invested in new computers and operating systems to allow our staff to work remotely during COVID to take and place legal notices.

When our subscribers read our newspaper, the public notices are right there for them to see what is happening in their community so they can be an active participant. RIGHT TO KNOW is headlined over our legal notices.

And then there is the issue of broadband internet service in rural areas, including where we do business in Central and Northcentral Pennsylvania. Many rural areas simply don't have broadband. Add to that our large senior population and accessing public notices is an issue. Because of these concerns, many taxpayers rely on our newspaper and other community newspapers across the state for their information.

Newspapers are independent of government. It defies logic to allow local agencies to post their own public notices on their own websites. Who is going to be monitoring to see if these notices are accurate and posted timely? Many of my local municipalities do not even have a website or if they do, they are not updated, or they use social media. Many have small staffs and are working hard to fulfill constituent requests ... why would you want to add public notices to their plate?

Our web sites are dynamic. They're updated constantly. That's why they have such large and growing audiences.

We want to continue to provide our community and our readers with quality, local journalism and public information. This bill will harm our ability to keep doing that. We urge you to vote no on House Bill 955.