



## **House Government Operations** **Vermont League of Cities and Towns Testimony on S. 97**

*February 8, 2018*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 97, the bill that would provide local governments and the state the choice to post public notices on electronic news media.

Electronic news media would be defined as “an internet website dedicated to Vermont news that is regularly accessed and used by the people of Vermont.” It would also have to meet the following four criteria:

1. The website publishes the majority of its content in the English language;
2. The website must be accessible to not less than a majority of residents in each county where the notice is directed;
3. The website is able to accept and publish official and other notices; and
4. The website regularly publishes information of a public character of interest to Vermont residents, property owners, or the general public.

Such a website must maintain a separate, clearly labeled area for current and active notices, and a searchable database of stored notices.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people and organizations are using internet based technology to make their businesses and interactions timely, efficient and broadly available. The electronic posting of public notices would achieve all those objectives, particularly in areas where print media are only occasionally available or not available at all. In state government we have spent significant amounts of money to move to electronic communications. By way of example, the Agency of Natural Resources launched its new much more efficient and informative Environmental Notice Bulletin this January.

It is also vital to the viability of local government that we encourage young Vermonters – who overwhelmingly get their information from web-based news media – to take up the responsibilities of democratic self-government. This policy change would be a significant step in that direction.

You may have heard from some of your cities and towns urging you to enact S. 97. Derby, Mendon, Guilford, Harford, Pittsford, Killington and West Windsor are some of the towns we have heard from to date.

It is time to give government the opportunity to move to electronic notices. The change would give communities an opportunity to reach a larger audience of readers – including younger readers or older individuals who rely on electronic news media. It would potentially save municipalities and the state a lot

of money. The print media now effectively has a monopoly on publication of legal notices. Competition from other media resources would be healthy for the public notice marketplace. As news media becomes more web-based and readership of online news increases, a change in the law that reflects those realities is necessary and overdue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

*Karen Horn, Director  
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