

To the Chair and members of the Committee:

I'm Adam Silverman. It is my honor to serve as the elected president of the Vermont Press Association, which represents the interests of the 11 daily and four dozen non-daily printed newspapers that circulate in Vermont.

Thank you very much for your invitation to discuss our association's opposition to S-97.

Public notice has been a big part of our nation's commitment to open government for more than 225 years. One reason public notices were created was to ensure the people were able to learn about budgets, special elections, new ordinances, major planning and zoning changes — actions the government was taking in their name.

Notices have always appeared in newspapers for one reason: Government wants its message to reach the widest audience.

Legal notices in Vermont currently receive double placement. Vermont newspapers place public notices in their print editions – *and* in their online editions. This is done with no extra cost to government agencies and taxpayers. Some newspapers have done this for 20 years or more.

For government (and the people), newspapers provide a permanent printed record that cannot be altered, hidden, manipulated, hacked or changed after the fact.

That's not the case online, where notices do not have the same permanence, and where they can be altered, hidden, manipulated, hacked, changed, expire after time passes, etc.

Newspapers also ensure readers will easily find public notices either in print or online. That would not happen if notices are scattered across various websites. And it is also important to note that Vermont is a place where Internet access — especially broadband access — remains unavailable in many remote parts of the state ... parts of the state that *are* served by printed newspapers.

I understand there have been a few attempts in Vermont in the past 40 years to change or remove public notices from community newspapers. Each time the Legislature rejected the idea because the Legislature believed the reduction in access to public notices would harm all Vermonters.

Some proponents of this measure say our opposition is really just about money. That's not true. This is an issue of transparency. But newspapers are not going to apologize for providing a valued service to our state, county and local governments. Everyone else who provides a service gets paid. And this is also true: The cost to municipalities of public notice is generally a tiny drop in the bucket.

This proposed legislation has the potential to negatively affect older and poorer people across the state. Groups like AARP in other states have come out against removing public notices from print newspapers.

The Vermont Press Association opposes S-97. We ask you to reject this bill on behalf of all Vermonters if it comes to a committee vote.