



**Senate Government Operations**  
**Vermont League of Cities and Towns**  
**Testimony on S.97**  
January 11, 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.

This bill would define electronic news media as “an internet website dedicated to Vermont news that is regularly accessed and used by the people of Vermont.” The website would also have to meet the following four criteria:

1. The website must publish 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.
4. The website must regularly publish 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 communications timely, efficient, and broadly available. The electronic posting of public notices would achieve those objectives, particularly in areas where print media are only occasionally available or not available at all. State government has spent a significant amount of money to move to electronic communications. The Agency of Natural Resources, for example, launched its new much more efficient and informative Environmental Notice Bulletin this month.

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 bill would take a significant step in that direction.

You may have heard from cities and towns around the state urging you to enact S.97. To date, the League has heard from Mendon, Guilford, and West Windsor in that regard.

It is time to give local government the opportunity to move to electronic notices. The change would allow communities to reach a larger audience – including young readers who typically rely on electronic news media. It would potentially save municipalities and the state a lot of money. The print media now effectively have a monopoly on publication of legal notices. Competition from other media resources would be healthy for the public notice marketplace. As news media become more web-based and readership of online news increases, a change in the law that reflects those realities is necessary and overdue.

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