

Testimony of Shawn Cunningham on behalf of the Chester Telegraph January 11, 2018

Good afternoon. My name is Shawn Cunningham and on behalf of *The Chester Telegraph's* editor and publisher, Cynthia Prairie, I would like to thank the committee for taking up this important legislation and for giving us the opportunity to testify on behalf of it.

Going into our seventh year, *The Telegraph* is a traditional newspaper in every meaningful way. We report on half a dozen local governments, schools, cops and courts, local business, the arts, community events and spot news.

We run our community's obituaries (at no charge) and regional columns on cooking and gardening as well as a local interest column called Chester Chatter that was published for 40 years until 2017 when it was deemed "too hokey" and dropped by a local shopper. People love it. We have an active calendar of events and a business directory with more than 100 entries.

As I said, we are a traditional newspaper in every meaningful way. The only way we differ is that we are 100% online. As we say "all news, no paper."

*The Telegraph* grew out of a lack of news coverage by print papers in the towns around Chester including Andover, Grafton, Weston, Londonderry, Windham and Cavendish. As those papers' circulations declined, they gave up on being regional and retrenched closer to home, losing readers in our area.

At the same time, we have grown. People looking for news in our area are increasingly turning to *The Telegraph*. Last year our readership – measured in page views – increased 43.6% over 2016 which was up 31.3% from 2015, and so on since 2012.

I think you would be hard pressed to find a print newspaper with that kind of sustained growth anywhere in the U.S. today. The reason for such growth is that not only are we filling our communities' needs for news, we are delivering it in a way the community wants to receive it.

We have kept a traditional front page look so people can go to the site and browse. We also post all of our stories to the Facebook news feeds more than 7,000 people. And more than 600 people have signed up to receive our weekly news alert – a digest of the week's news – delivered by email each Wednesday.

And during an emergency – an overturned gasoline tanker or a truck leaking hazardous materials through town are two examples – we have reported in real-time and even helped reroute traffic. People have recognized this. A local merchant tells the story of a fire truck racing down Main St. and his shoppers taking out their phones and going to *The Telegraph* even before the truck arrived at the fire.

*The Telegraph* is totally free to readers. There's no subscription and no paywall as with the websites of cellulose based newspapers. *The Telegraph* goes everywhere that there's internet, around the clock. With large portions of our area's grand lists owned by second homeowners, *The Telegraph* is keeping resident and non-resident taxpayers informed on local issues.

So, we have the public, and the question seems to be how would we handle public notices.

While there are several options, it would be clean and simple to have a pull down menu on every page – just like those for obituaries, the calendar and the business directory – and label it “public notices.”

The menu would contain all the current notices and a Public Notice Archive. The archive would contain past notices. We can format these notices to be searchable by key word, date, subject and publishing government entity.

In addition, *The Telegraph* is one of about a dozen Vermont newspapers archived by NewsBank – one of the largest news media databases in the world. We can format a public notice in such a way that it would be picked up by NewBank and become part of its searchable database as a backup to ours.

We have an RSS feed that sends anyone who signs up for it, an email as soon as a public notice is published. That service is free of charge.

And when we bill for a public notice, the advertiser receives – by email - a digital file (or files) of the materials published. If a proof of publication statement is required, that can also be attached to the invoice.

All of these are just the manageable mechanics of publishing notices online.

The question is when will we recognize that Vermonters – just like everyone else in America – are increasingly getting their news from internet sources. This is a new paradigm and if we want those people – especially younger people who are far less likely to pick up a cellulose based newspaper – to be included and participate in our civic life this adjustment to our laws is necessary.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you have.