*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

*Jan Murphy, Director of Government Affairs*

*O: 717-703-3031 |* *C: 717-756-7075*

*[janm@pa-news.org](mailto:janm@pa-news.org)*

*June 18, 2025*

**Pushing public notices to**

**government websites is a bad move**

*State Senate bill endangers taxpayer protection*

**By William M. Cotter**

*President*

*Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association*

Legislation in the Pennsylvania Senate risks allowing local governments to operate in the shadows, leaving taxpayers unaware of decisions affecting their pocketbooks, their communities and their quality of life.

State [**Senate Bill 194**](https://www.palegis.us/legislation/bills/2025/sb194), sponsored by Sen. Doug Mastriano (R-Adams/Franklin), would allow school districts and municipal and county governments the option of posting meeting and other legally required public notices on their websites instead of publishing them in newspapers, the trusted source of public notices for generations.

Proponents of SB 194 believe the bill offers a modernization of the Newspaper Advertising Act that mandates where public notices be published.

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association calls SB 194 bad for government transparency, accountability and, ultimately, taxpayer protection.

Public notices keep the public informed about government activity, allowing them to weigh in on zoning, public school construction, taxes and other local issues before official decisions are made.

SB 194 is a short-sighted attempt to give government what it wants: diminished public oversight. In other words, the bill creates a serious conflict of interest for the local government whose authority becomes the fox guarding the henhouse.

Government websites must never be allowed to satisfy Pennsylvania’s legal requirement for public notice publication because:

* They are **not** and never can be the independent providers of public notices that newspapers have been and continue to be. As a disinterested third party, newspapers complete the legal publication process by providing the best possible evidence to a court, via proof of publication, if there is a legal challenge. A publisher has no vested interest in the outcome of such a case. A government entity does. Putting public notices about meetings, bids, bond issues and budgets in the hands of government, as SB 194 would, is an invitation for abuse.
* Achieving transparency poses challenges for local governments. Would public notice posting on their websites be any different?
* Just 73 percent of government agencies sampled in the state Office of Open Records 2023 [Agency Website Review](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/www.openrecords.pa.gov/Documents/2023_RTKL_Webpage_Review.pdf) provided the required agency open records officer contact information, OOR contact information, and a Right-to-Know Law request form. If government agencies cannot provide the most basic transparency information, timely public notice posting would prove challenging at best.
* Traffic to government websites is abysmal.
* Government websites are difficult to navigate
* Government website content is not updated.
* Government websites do not reach taxpayers without access to high-speed broadband

and those who lack the skills to use it. Pennsylvania has a significant digital divide that will only be exacerbated by SB 194. Income and tech savvy cannot be a prerequisites to participating in democracy.

* Government agencies will likely need to hire additional staff and purchase more technology to comply with state public notice requirements. This would be more expensive than the cost of publishing notices in newspapers, an infinitesimal portion of a general fund budget. Typically, the annual cost per municipal resident is less than the price of a small cup of coffee:
* Coaldale Borough in Schuylkill County budgeted $4,000 for solicitor/legal fees in 2025; that figure, which appears to include costs beyond newspaper public notice publication, translates to $1.70 per borough resident.
* This year Sayre Borough in Bradford County budgeted $5,000 for legal advertising or 92 cents per resident.

SB 194 would require taxpayers to routinely search multiple websites to stay informed about ways their hard-earned tax dollars might be spent. Creating such unnecessary confusion is not only absurd and burdensome, but it is also a disservice to the public and an obstacle to participatory government.

PNA supports the comprehensive state [**House Bill 1291**](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/bill_history.cfm?syear=2023&sind=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1291), bipartisan public notice legislation to modernize the Newspaper Advertising Act that is sponsored by House Local Government Committee Chairman Robert Freeman (D-Northampton). PNA continues to work with Chairman Freeman and other stakeholders on this bill that would serve all Pennsylvanians by keeping public notices in printed newspapers, while also requiring their publication online, in front of newspaper paywalls and on the statewide public notice website managed by PNA for more than a decade at no cost to taxpayers.

Newspapers today are reaching their biggest audiences through print and digital products that serve communities statewide. Pennsylvanians deserve nothing less than one trusted place to find public notices: their local newspaper of record.

How can you help? Contact your state senator to oppose Senate Bill 194. Contact your representative to support House Bill 1291. Write a letter to the editor.

*The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is the official trade organization for print, digital and news media-related members statewide. Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, PNA has advocated for legislation that improves public access laws in the commonwealth.*