



## HB 1291 will modernize public notice in Pa.

*PNA supports comprehensive print, digital updates to 49-year-old law*

**What:** State House Bill 1291 would amend the Newspaper Advertising Act of 1976 to expand and modernize the definition of “newspaper of general circulation” to permit public notices in digital newspapers, free newspapers and online-only newspapers.

**Who, when, where:** Rep. Robert L. Freeman (D-Northampton), chief sponsor of the bipartisan HB 1291, is chair of the House Local Government Committee, which is expected to consider the bill in May 2025 at the Capitol. Bill co-sponsors, as of April 28, included Democratic Reps. Ryan Bizzarro, Lisa Borowski, Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz, Nathan Davidson, Jose Giral, Jim Haddock, Liz Hanbidge, Carol Hill-Evans, Emily Kinkad, Maureen Madden, David Madsen, Steven Malagari, Ed Neilson, Tarah Probst, Benjamin Sanchez, Arvind Venkat and Ben Waxman. As of April 28, Republican co-sponsors were Reps. Mark Gillen, Andrew Kuzma, Alec Ryncavage and David Zimmerman. The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association (PNA) supports the bill.



“As more newspapers expand digital platforms and many rural areas and certain demographics within the state struggle with limited internet access, this definition should be broadened to address the circumstances of all Pennsylvanians so that public notices reach as many people as possible,” **Chairman Freeman** said.

**Why, how:** HB 1291 recognizes the importance of maintaining independence in the public notice process while acknowledging technological changes and modernization of the newspaper industry in a way that maximizes public access. **The legislation would:**

- Continue to require the publishing of public notices in printed newspapers of general circulation, where one exists.
- If no printed newspaper of general circulation exists, allow public notices to be published in a digital newspaper of general circulation, which is a digital descendant of a printed newspaper that meets specific requirements related to format and content.
- If no print or digital newspaper of general circulation exists, allow public notices to be published in a free newspaper of general circulation or online-only newspaper of general circulation that meets specific requirements related to format and content.
- Require every newspaper of general circulation, no matter its format, to maintain a website in real time and post public notices in front of pay walls.
- At no additional cost, require all newspapers to also post public notices on a statewide public notice website maintained by PNA, [www.publicnoticepa.com](http://www.publicnoticepa.com), concurrent with their local publication. The statewide public notice website must be free to the public.

### **Of the people:<sup>1</sup>**

- 92% of Pennsylvania registered voters overwhelmingly favor state law requiring public notices to be published in print editions of local newspapers to alert taxpayers about important local issues – like zoning changes, school closures, and environmental proposals that impact health and property – before government takes action.
- 85% of Pennsylvania registered voters said they trust local newspapers, print and online, more than any other type of news media outlet.

### Public notices must remain in newspapers because:

This is where Pennsylvanians look for public notice information.

- Newspaper audiences have never been bigger due to print and digital platforms.
- Newspapers are where Pennsylvanians go to receive trustworthy local news about their main streets and communities across the commonwealth. Newspapers support family-sustaining jobs, and through charitable donations and volunteerism, champion the towns, boroughs, suburbs, cities and rural areas they serve. Acting as government watchdogs, newspapers protect taxpayer money into the future.

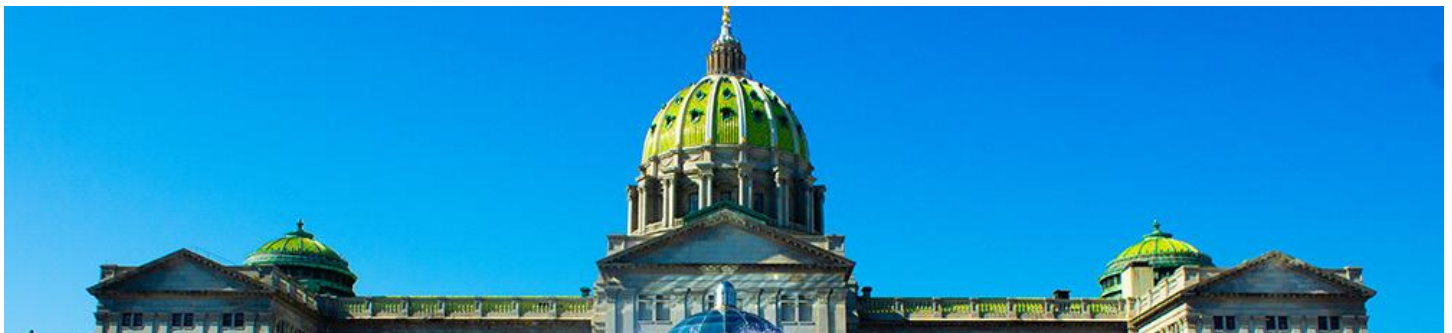
### In their own words:<sup>2</sup>

- **Matt Espenshade, president of the Pennsylvania State Grange:** “Our local newspapers are the backbones of our communities, the way that we exchange knowledge and information, celebrate the great things that are going on in our local communities. They see the public notices about the things that are going on in their state and local governments. However, checking out the state government’s website on a routine basis isn’t exactly on the priority list of many of our many people in a given community, and it takes away from the openness that there is when you have meeting notices and other public notices printed in the papers on a routine basis.”
- **David Boardman, dean of the Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University:** “No matter what political party you’re in, the fact is that if public notices were taken away from newspapers it would be a fatal blow for many small newspapers. That is, unfortunately, the economics of the newspaper industry right now. Academic study after academic study demonstrates that the loss of a local newspaper leads to higher crime, more civic unrest, and decreased voter participation. That’s not only bad for newspapers, it’s bad for democracy.”

### The bottom line:

Keeping public notices in newspapers of general circulation ensures transparency and accountability. Newspapers keep the public informed about government actions, legal proceedings and other important community matters. Newspapers provide a neutral platform where notices can be easily verified and reach a broad, diverse audience.

“The changes proposed in my bill are consistent with various recent public notice statutes adopted across the nation and will update our public notice law while ensuring Pennsylvanians can continue to find public notices in their trusted local newspapers, a disinterested, third-party whose constitutional role is to hold government accountable,” Chairman Freeman said.



### CONTACT:

**Jan Murphy** | *PNA Directory of Government Affairs*  
O: 717-703-3031 | C: 717-756-7075 | [janm@pa-news.org](mailto:janm@pa-news.org)

<sup>1</sup> “PA NewsMedia Association Benchmark,” survey of Pennsylvania registered voters Aug. 24-28, 2022, conducted for PNA by Public Opinion Strategies, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> “The Impact of the Newspaper Industry on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,” March 2025 addendum to January 2025 report, Parker Strategy Group, Erie, Pennsylvania.