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Dear Editor,

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association strongly opposes state Senate Bill 194, legislation that would allow local governments to post public notices on their websites instead of publishing them in newspapers.

The Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) backed the bill in a recent op-ed. In response, we would like to correct the record regarding statements made in the PSATS piece, *"Public Information Should Not Come With a Price Tag."*

**PSATS:** According to a May 2024 Pew Research Center report, only 9% of Americans prefer getting their local news from print newspapers. Meanwhile, more individuals have turned to local government websites or community newsletters for updates.

**Correcting the record:** That percentage is a national, not Pennsylvania, statistic. Consumer behavior varies state to state. That [Pew Research statistic](#) represents news consumption of print only. Virtually all print newspapers have an online version. Further, the assertion that more people consume information on government websites and in community newsletters is arbitrary and lacks attribution.

**PSATS:** Patrick Henry warned that "the liberties of people never were, nor ever will be, secure, when the transactions of their rulers may be concealed from them." Perhaps no one captured the stakes more clearly than James Madison, who wrote: "A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both."

**Correcting the record:** Regarded as the father of the Constitution, Madison wrote the Bill of Rights, which includes the First Amendment. He didn't like the press but saw its value. He knew freedom of the press could be abused, but he thought it was better to leave a few "noxious branches" than to cut away the "proper fruits." Those "proper fruits" have well-served the nation for 234 years.

**PSATS:** For decades, Harrisburg insiders have dictated where public notices must be placed. Now, they want to preserve that monopoly to benefit a narrow special interest group living off the public trough.

**Correcting the record:** If newspapers are a special interest group, so, too, are the local government associations like PSATS, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Pennsylvania Association of Boroughs and other taxpayer-funded groups that seek less transparency and accountability in government. Citizens should check out PSATS' [legislative agenda and policies](#) and consider how much public money local governments spend on association memberships in comparison to the minimal amount spent on public notice transparency.

Further, local governments do a poor job of keeping their websites up to date, correct and easy to navigate. Newspapers are in the business of frequently updating their sites and providing information to the communities they serve. Moreover, newspapers publish legal notices in front of paywalls, so anyone can access them for free. Newspapers exist to inform the public and hold government accountable, and public notices play an important part in that constitutionally protected role. For all those reasons, we encourage citizens to get behind PNA's efforts to protect government transparency by contacting their state senators to tell them to oppose Senate Bill 194.

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