



BILL: Senate Bill 170 / House Bill 291
TITLE: County Boards of Education- Bid Advertisement Threshold and Electronic Posting of Hearing Notices and Bid Advertisements
HEARING DATE: March 20, 2024
POSITION: SUPPORT
COMMITTEE: House Appropriations Committee
CONTACT: Mr. Steve Edwards, Deputy Communications Officer (301-766-8914)

The Washington County Board of Education supports Senate Bill 170, which would authorize county boards of education to post on the websites of certain local school systems hearing notices related to preliminary approval of a school site and advertisements for bids for school buildings, improvements, supplies, or equipment that exceed \$100,000; increasing, from \$25,000 to \$100,000, the threshold amount of costs of school buildings, improvements, supplies, or equipment that trigger the requirement for county board's to advertise for bids; etc. The bill also allows for designated hearing notices and bid requests to be posted in a newspaper of general circulation in the county or electronically on the local school system website.

As the newspaper industry has changed, and in many non-metropolitan areas greatly diminished or disappeared, Washington County Public Schools (WCPS) has found it more challenging to meet public notice and advertising requirements through the utilization of newspapers of general circulation. Many areas with low population densities are no longer served by newspapers. In those that are, the frequency of the newspaper's circulation has often been reduced from daily to weekly. In other cases, local newspapers have consolidated with regional newspapers or simply ended operations. In many communities, this has resulted in a lack of newspapers in which hearing notices and bid requests can be published and created a burden for school districts seeking to meet public notice requirements.

In addition to the changes in the newspaper industry noted above, the manner in which citizens consume news and seek information has changed. Studies have shown the majority of citizens now seek information through online resources, including social media, and prefer to go directly to the source of the information they desire instead of seeking information through the news media, particularly print media. In many cases, information on newspaper websites is only available to subscribers and severely restricted to non-subscribers by paywalls. WCPS has responded to the changing media landscape by providing public notices on its website and social media channels as well as the Washington County's local government website. This approach not only provides greater access to the public than newspapers, but enables notices to be posted in "real time" without the delays often associated with searching for and contracting with a newspaper, providing and approving copy, and having a notice published.

Providing the option for designated hearing notices and bid requests to be posted electronically on the local school system website will make such information more broadly and easily accessible to the public. The bill does not inhibit the

continued use of print media, but expands the ability for the public to readily access important notices by providing the option of posting them on local school district websites. The bill will also result in advertising cost savings to local school systems at a time when every dollar is important and help to eliminate a potential barrier to providing information to the public in areas that are not served by a newspaper. Most importantly, county boards of education can comply with the notice requirements included in the bill using existing resources and without assuming any additional costs. Providing the option to post hearing notices and bid notifications on local school websites or in a newspaper of general circulation will also enable local boards of education to determine the best approach to communicate with the communities they serve in a timely, cost-effective manner.

Washington County Board of Education respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 170.

Thank you.

cc: Washington County Board of Education Members
Washington County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly
Dr. David T. Sovine, Superintendent
Dr. Jennifer Webster, Associate Superintendent for Administration and Leadership
Dr. Gary Willow, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Jeffrey Proulx, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Ilissa Ramm, Chief Legal Counsel
Mr. John Woolums, Director of Governmental Relations, Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Ms. Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland