

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 623
Judiciary

(Delegate Embry)

Estates and Trusts - Estate Administration - Publication of Notice

This bill requires the register of wills of each county and Baltimore City to coordinate to establish and maintain a centralized website for use by all registers of wills to publish notice as required under the Estates and Trusts Article. The bill also requires publication of specified notices on the centralized website, instead of publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the appropriate county (or counties); specifically, notices of (1) appointment of a personal representative of an estate; (2) judicial probate of an estate; (3) appointment of a foreign personal representative and estate information; and (4) a meeting for distribution of the net estate by the court.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State finances.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law:

Registers of Wills

In general, the registers of wills in each of the State's 24 jurisdictions are responsible for the administration of estates by providing proper forms and direction, assisting and advising any person who requests assistance in the preparation of any form for

administrative probate, admitting wills to probate and issuing letters of administration, auditing accounts, and maintaining accurate records of all estate matters. The registers also serve as clerks of the orphans' courts.

Published Newspaper Notices

The register of wills, foreign personal representative, or personal representative must publish in a newspaper of general circulation in the appropriate county (or counties) specified notices as follows:

- *Register of Wills* – the register of wills must publish notice (1) once a week in three successive weeks, announcing the appointment of a personal representative, and notifying creditors of the estate to present their claims, and (2) once a week for two successive weeks, that a petition for judicial probate has been filed in the orphans' court;
- *Foreign Personal Representative* – a foreign personal representative must publish notice once a week for three successive weeks, announcing the appointment of the foreign personal representative, and other estate information; and
- *Personal Representative* – a personal representative must publish notice once a week in three successive weeks of a meeting for distribution of the net estate by the court.

Small Business Effect: The bill is expected to have a meaningful impact on small business news outlets in the State. A 2024 [report](#) by the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism (*Maryland Local News Ecosystem Study*) and information provided by the Maryland-Delaware-DC Press Association indicate that a significant majority of print-based news outlets in Maryland are small businesses.

The registers of wills estimate that the annual amount of spending to publish estate notices in newspapers statewide is approximately \$1.4 million (the cost is paid by estates or their representatives, not the registers of wills), with an average cost of \$129 for the most common notices. The Maryland-Delaware-DC Press Association estimates annual spending is higher, \$3.5 million.

A survey of Maryland news organizations conducted as part of the *Maryland Local News Ecosystem Study* indicates that approximately 72% of responding organizations (not including one person blogs, social media outlets, or commercial radio and television operations) have annual budgets of under \$500,000, approximately 57% have budgets under \$250,000, and approximately 39% have budgets under \$100,000.

Additional Comments: Although the General Assembly passed similar legislation in the 2024 session (House Bill 1258), the Governor vetoed the bill.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 1258 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Maryland-Delaware-DC Press Association; Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland; Register of Wills; Department of Legislative Services

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