

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 64
(Senator West)
Judicial Proceedings

**Legal Advertisement or Legal Notice - Publication in Newspaper or Newspaper
in General Circulation - Digital Newspapers**

This bill expands the definition of “newspaper” or “newspaper in general circulation,” as they apply to statutory or other requirements to publish a legal advertisement or legal notice, to include print or digital publications, as defined under the bill. A digital publication that publishes a legal advertisement or legal notice must (1) maintain an archive of all published legal advertisements and legal notices that shall be available to the public; and (2) be accessible in the county or municipal corporation that is required to publish the legal advertisement or legal notice. The bill also repeals provisions that are generally duplicative of the bill relating to the publication of legal advertisements or legal notices in Dorchester County.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill relates only to local governments.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: For legal notifications to be published in a digital publication, the digital publication must (1) employ or retain one or more persons to create, edit, produce, and distribute original content concerning matters of public interest through specified forms of reporting; (2) employ at least one individual full-time, working at least 30 hours a week,

as specified; (3) publish at least one article per week concerning matters of public interest for the county or municipal corporation during the immediately preceding 12 months; and (4) meet specified reporting criteria if designated as a tax-exempt organization.

Current Law:

Newspapers and Legal Advertisement Requirements – Generally

Unless otherwise specified, “newspaper” or “newspaper in general circulation” mean a publication that (1) has at least four pages; (2) habitually contains news items, reports of current events, editorial comments, advertising matter, and other miscellaneous information that is of public interest and is found generally in an ordinary newspaper; (3) has been published and distributed, by sale, from an established place of business at least once a week for six months or more before publication of the advertisement or notice; (4) has general circulation throughout the community where the publication is published; and (5) qualifies for periodicals rates for mailing through the United States Postal Service.

Broadly, legal advertisements and legal notices must be published in newspapers to give sufficient notice of specified government and public activities of interest to the general public. Legal advertisements and legal notices include, among other things, the appointment and election of government officials, specified judicial activity and judgements, business entity and real property actions, meetings and decisions of government bodies, and other specified occurrences and events as required under current law.

County-specific Provisions

In Prince George’s County, “newspaper in general circulation” includes a newspaper that (1) is designated by the county council as a newspaper of record, or (2) meets specified criteria with respect to the county and is published by a small business.

Chapter 688 of 2024 established that, in Dorchester County only, if a law, resolution, or court order, judgement, or decree requires the county to publish a legal advertisement or legal notice (1) any required advertisement or notice must be published and distributed through print and digital format; (2) the time period required for publication starts once the first advertisement or notice appears in print or digital format; and (3) if there is no print and digital publication that meets specified qualifications, the advertisement or notice may be placed in any digital publication that can be accessed in the county and that regularly contains local news and information for the county.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 74 of 2025.

Designated Cross File: HB 10 (Delegate Foley) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Cecil, Dorchester, Frederick, Montgomery, and Somerset counties; Maryland Association of Counties; City of Havre de Grace; Maryland Municipal League; Department of Legislative Services

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