

To: Health & Government Operations committee

From: Jim Normandin, President of APG Media of Chesapeake

Date: March 1, 2022

RE: UNFAVORABLE HB 523

I represent The Enterprise, which is the newspaper of record for St. Mary's County. As part of APG Media of Chesapeake, we have a strong commitment to community journalism. We publish quality, community newspapers that are among the best in the nation and have top-notch websites and apps associated with each of them. We provide leadership within the communities our newspapers serve, recognizing that strong communities deserve strong newspapers. We are the primary source of local information in our communities for government news, civic affairs, social events, business, sports and leisure activities. We are a positive economic force, assisting advertisers in promoting their goods and services to customers and readers. Our newspaper and printing operations are rooted in more than 200 years of history in Maryland, Delaware and DC. Our uniqueness comes from preserving and documenting our rich heritage while working with our communities and our customers toward a prosperous future.

We oppose HB 523, which would loosen the requirements of the publications that carry public notice. Public notice is a cornerstone of the public's right to know. Residents of St. Mary's County have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent and what government is transacting on their behalf. Seeing that information in a trusted, verified news source is critical. It's even more important to know that public notices are going to a verifiable audience. That is why it is crucial that public notices are published in newspapers that have subscriber lists and are audited, as required by the second-class periodicals permit specified in current law.

Generally, free publications are distributed at various locations, with no verifiable record of whether residents take them or whether stacks end up in the recycling bin. A publication with subscribers inherently has value – or else people would not request the product.

We know the readers of The Enterprise – and can prove it through our annual audit and our paid subscriber list. Additionally, all of our public notices are freely available on our own website SOMDNEWS.COM and our press association's website.

Our organization prides itself on the comprehensive, valued services we provide to the residents of St. Mary's county and southern Maryland. We ask for an unfavorable report.