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February 26, 2024

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Support (FAV) – HB 1258 – Estates and Trusts – Estate Administration – Publication of Notice

Dear Chair Clippinger and Committee Members:

I write in support of House Bill 1258 and ask for a favorable committee report on this important legislation.

My name is Alexis Burrell-Rohde. I am the Register of Wills for Baltimore County and am testifying in favor of House Bill 1258. The idea behind publishing legal notice is to give notice to unknown heirs and creditors of an estate notice of the death of an individual. This notice is important so that the heir or creditor has the opportunity to enforce their pecuniary interest in an estate when they might not have received actual notice by way of mailed notice. The issue with the existing law requiring these notices to appear in “newspapers of general circulation” is that newspapers do not reach their intended audiences. For example, in Baltimore County, we publish notices in the *Daily Record*. This is a good newspaper, but it hardly qualifies as a newspaper of “general circulation” in that it is a newspaper for legal news. It costs \$113 to publish in the *Daily Record*, which is certainly an expense for estates. If this newspaper reached “unknown heirs” as is intended by the existing statute, it would be money well spent. But, very few members of the general public read the *Daily Record* so those individuals are not served by the \$113 expense.

This legislation proposes that instead, these notices appear for free on the Register’s of Wills website. The Register of Wills online database has been up and running since March 2020, with up to 9,000 views per month, and a total of almost 240,000 unique visits since its inception. When you Google “Maryland estate notices,” from any public computer or smartphone, our website is the first search result, so it couldn’t be easier to find. Right now, unknown heirs search our database when by word of mouth learn of a death that might impact them. Creditors, on the other hand, routinely search the database. In each case, very few unknown heirs or creditors learn of a death through newspaper publication. This fact makes the \$113 fee pointless.

I respectfully recommend a favorable report on House Bill 1258 and appreciate the Committee’s thoughtful attention.

Best regards,

Alexis Burrell-Rohde
Register of Wills
Baltimore County