

February 12, 2025

HB623-Estates and Trusts- Estates Administration- Publication of Notice
(OPPOSED)

Dear Chairman Luke Clippinger and Vice Chair Sandy Bartlett
And Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Daily Record, having been a partner to Maryland's legal and legislative community since 1888, I am submitting this letter in **OPPOSITION** to HB623- Estates and Trust - Estate Administration - Publication of Notice.

The bill eliminates the requirement that a personal representative of a decedent, the register of wills or foreign personal representative from having to publish notice in a newspaper of general circulation. Under current law, the aforementioned register and representatives must provide notice in a newspaper of general circulation for a certain amount of time to provide notice to creditors for any outstanding debt owed by the decedent and notice of death to the heirs of the decedent.

This legislation, which is a reintroduction to the bill introduced in the Maryland General Assembly 2024 Legislative Session, was, again drafted without any input from the newspapers in Maryland, which have, for decades if not centuries, faithfully served their communities by providing public notices.

The bill's sponsor, Delegate Embry, has been a supporter of the Daily Record and newspapers in general, which is why we are convinced that she did not realize in 2024 and now in 2025 the collateral damage this bill would and will have on the newspaper industry.

This bill will have a significant impact on the newspaper industry, including significant job loss across Maryland. This industry is already facing significant financial constraints. While we appreciate that the Register of Wills will offer this service for free, the requirement that notice be published in newspapers ensures that a wide and independent net is cast to inform heirs and creditors alike of the death of the individual at issue. Although the Register of Wills website may be "Free Access", it will not be noticeable access for the communities' notice is intended to serve and provide.

The Daily Record is a robust local news source driving traffic to their site through unique content, email alerts and public notice alerts. We have a history in

ensuring public notice content is accessible for all through libraries, subscriptions, and online access (free to all). In addition to the notices on The Daily Record site, notices also appear on sites for all newspapers in Maryland and the MD/DC/DE Press Association website. Newspapers are in the business of audience development and ensure readers can access content in various mediums in a host of ways.

Also, the legislation's financial impact to large and small newspapers of general circulation will be a loss of several millions of dollars and most critical, the elimination of many jobs and several community papers going out of business. This is not hyperbole; it is a fact. To pass HB 623 which will have a seismic impact on longtime small businesses and their employees across the state, without an honest discussion of its merits, serves no one.

While we recognize that society is transitioning to digital press (we at the Daily Record offer both print and digital subscriptions and all public notice is in front of the paywall), notices that serve the community such as the ones impacted by this legislation (many from an older generation) should be placed in mediums where the general community seeks trusted legal notices and information- that is the print news industry.

Studies show that when a community loses its source of local news, it experiences decreased voter turnout and civic engagement; increased municipal borrowing costs that lead to higher taxes; and decreased transparency among government and business officials, leading to increased waste, fraud, and abuse. As newspapers shutter, communities become more polarized, and we lose sight of our shared values. During this era of intense national partisanship, local newspapers offer a path forward.

HB623 provides little time for educating people where these digital notices appear when traditionally and historically, they have been placed in their local newspaper. The effective date of this bill is October 1, 2025, with no ramping up time to educate the community, including creditors and relatives. The benefit of having notices published on the Register of Wills website rather than in print in a newspaper at the cost of many newspaper jobs and in some cases, newspaper companies, is not a fair, civil, effective or a humane tradeoff.

Newspapers matter! We believe keeping local newspapers alive and growing (not reducing) jobs in Maryland is important to you and your fellow colleagues and therefore we urge you to report UNFAVORBLE on HB623 for the aforementioned reasons and to allow notices at issue to continue serving the communities they were designed to serve.

Respectfully,

Suzanne Fischer - Huettner

Suzanne Fischer-Huettner
Managing Director / Publisher, The Daily Record