

CHRIS WEST
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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 22, 2026

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 64 – Legal Advertisement or Legal Notice – Publication in Newspaper or Newspaper in General Circulation – Digital Newspapers

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am here to introduce Senate Bill 64. This legislation would extend the current law to allow for the publication by attorneys and counties and municipalities of required legal notices in digital media, recognizing that much of local news is now accessed online. Under the current law, print media is the only media format designated to publish legal notices. Senate Bill 64 updates the law to reflect current trends.

Nationally, 148 local newspapers have closed in the last 12 months. Furthermore, the Merrill School of Journalism at the University of Maryland recently conducted a comprehensive study that provides a snapshot of the current local media landscape in Maryland. The Merrill study found that there are 176 local media outlets in Maryland, 156 of which are focused on news and journalistically supplied content. 78 of them are print-based “newspapers” that also publish websites or PDFs of their publications. 53 are digital-only publications, including the Baltimore Banner and Maryland Matters. It’s simply no longer practical or economically feasible to limit the publication of legal notices to print media. This legislation is intended to help a variety of interests.

SB64 authorizes local digital news outlets to publish legal notices, but requires that digital publications meet criteria which guarantee they are actual news organizations covering local communities before they are able to accept legal notices.

For example, for legal notices to be published in a digital publication, the publication must employ one or more persons to create original content concerning matters of public interest through various forms of reporting such as interviews, document review and the like. In addition, the digital publication must employ at least one individual full-time, working at least 30 hours per week, and must publish at least one article per week concerning matters of public interest for the county or municipality.

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Because attorneys and counties and municipalities will have more publication options once this bill is passed, it is likely that the greater competition will drive the cost of the running these legal notices down. Importantly, SB64 also mandates that any digital publication running these legal notices must have an archive accessible to the public.

I should also note that this bill is sponsored in the House by Delegate Linda Foley, a former national president of the News Guild Union, which represents journalists and other media workers. Delegate Foley spent decades working in the newspaper industry. We believe this legislation accurately speaks for the needs of the industry. It also addresses the need for our constituents to use 21st century technology to access priority information.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 64 and will be happy to answer any questions.