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Environment and Transportation  
Committee

Chair, Non-Energy Utilities  
Subcommittee

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony:** HB 10 Legal Advertisement or Legal Notice – Publication in Newspaper or Newspaper in General Circulation – Digital Newspapers

**Committee:** Judiciary

**Hearing Date:** January 28, 2026

**Position:** Favorable

Good afternoon Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis and members of the Judiciary Committee.

For the record, I'm Delegate Linda Foley, and I am presenting HB 10 Legal Advertisement or Legal Notice – Publication in Newspaper or Newspaper in General Circulation – Digital Newspapers.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill.

As a former journalist and former president of the union representing news workers, I believe it is crucial that our state laws keep pace with the rapidly changing media landscape. HB 10 is about bringing Maryland's public notice publication system into the 21st century.

Current law only allows for the publication of public notices in printed newspapers. However, that framework no longer reflects how most Marylanders access local news. Much of our local journalism now is consumed online, and many traditional print publications have either migrated to digital platforms or disappeared altogether.

HB 10 has two primary goals. First, it seeks to help reduce the cost to local governments of publishing required legal notices. Second, it expands the pool of eligible publications so that more local news organizations (particularly digital outlets) can post public notices.

The urgency of this update is clear. Nationally, 148 local newspapers have closed in the last 12 months alone. That's more than two per week.

In 2024, the Merrill School of Journalism at the University of Maryland conducted a study that provides a snapshot of the current local media landscape in Maryland. We all know how critical

locally based, journalistically sourced news outlets are to the functioning of our communities and the democratic governments that run them. (The study is attached to my written testimony.)

The Merrill study found that there are 176 local media outlets in Maryland, 156 of which are focused on news and journalistically supplied content. Seventy-eight (78) of them are print-based “newspapers” that also publish websites or PDFs of their publication. Fifty-three (53) are digital-only publications. The study also looked at the geographic landscape of Maryland’s local media. Caroline County has no news outlets at all, and 8 counties have only 3 or fewer news outlets. While the number of so-called “legacy” media (newspapers, TV stations, radio, etc.) is shrinking, the number of media outlets in Maryland has grown since 2020, with all the growth coming from digital media.

It’s important that local media outlets be supported. It’s also important that there be regular, independent notice of local government functions available to members of the community. Local, independent news outlets are the best vehicles to fulfill that mission. Solely posting required legal notices on government websites undermines transparency and conflicts with the constitutional role of a free press.

HB 10 also includes important safeguards. Digital publications must meet clear criteria before they are eligible to publish legal notices. They must be legitimate news organizations that cover local communities, maintain a publicly accessible archive, and employ at least one person whose job is focused on reporting local news and information.

In an era when many local newspapers have shuttered or sharply reduced coverage, adapting our laws to this new media reality is both necessary and responsible. A similar bill covering Dorchester County was passed two years ago, and shortly thereafter the county’s print newspaper went out of business—highlighting exactly why changes in our public notice system are needed.

HB 10 strikes the right balance. It modernizes our public notice system, supports independent local journalism, expands access for residents, and offers potential cost savings for local governments, all while maintaining strong standards for transparency and accountability.

For all these reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB 10 so we can help bring Maryland's public notice requirements into the 21st century. Thank you.