



MODERNIZING PUBLIC NOTICES

SB2450 (POWERS) / HB2114 (CRAWFORD)

BACKGROUND

Tennessee law safeguards the public's right to know about significant government actions, court proceedings, or other official matters by requiring all public notices be printed in a newspaper of general circulation. TCA 1-3-120 requires a public notice to also be posted on a newspaper's website, but only after the notice has first been published in print. Additionally, if the newspaper charges a fee for publishing public notices, or places notices behind a digital paywall, taxpayers must ultimately pay that cost.

Government entities and the newspaper industry support the principle of free public access to information. However, as technology has advanced and citizens' news consumption habits have shifted, the traditional newspaper publishing model has become outdated for public notice.

PROBLEM

The existing requirement to publish public notices in newspapers no longer effectively fulfills its intended purpose of promoting public access. Most citizens now obtain information online rather than from print newspapers. As a result, there are fewer newspapers still in existence, and many of those remaining have reduced publication schedules or transitioned wholly to online publication.

SOLUTION

Modernize the law governing public notices by allowing local governmental entities to publish notices in a newspaper, on an official government website, or on an approved third-party platform that meets transparency and access standards.

Adopting this legislation would modernize Tennessee's public notice system by making essential information more accessible, timely, and transparent for all citizens.

Posting notices online offers easier and broader access without being constrained by newspaper schedules, publication, and purchase costs.

Government agencies benefit from faster, more effective processes while upholding the public's right to know. Searchable, online archives strengthen accountability and long-term oversight, ensuring that public information remains available.

Together these reforms align Tennessee's practices with modern technology and the way people now seek information, creating a fairer, more efficient, and more transparent system for everyone.