

Public Notices

A financially strained newspaper industry in New Jersey

- Without public notice advertising the newspaper industry could lose more than 200-300 jobs.
- Many newspapers including many small weekly newspapers will shut down.
- Without a commercial television station, many residents are dependent on newspapers for news. This is especially true of small weeklies that cover town news.
- Without a TV station and the closure of some papers, the state of news coverage in NJ will be greatly diminished.

The purpose of public notice is to prevent official actions from occurring in secret.

Cost to towns

- Office of Legislative Services noted in 2011 that government takeover of public notices “would have an indeterminate cost” to local governments and state agencies.
- Web site systems must be secure and searchable. This will add to the cost for many towns, especially smaller ones.
- Public notices are essential public documents. Outside parties altering them could lead to lawsuits.

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Cost to towns, cont.

- The potential for higher personnel costs exist for some towns.
- The potential for higher IT costs exists.
- Higher costs to the state for unemployment benefits exists due to newspaper layoffs. It could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars per month.
- Private party notices will add a significant burden on towns.

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Cost to towns, cont.

- The current cost to towns for legally required transparency via public notices is very small.
- Neither the legislature nor any other government body has done an adequate analysis of the new costs to towns and state government resulting to the removal of public notices from newspapers.

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All New Jersey public notices are already online

- Since 2003, NJPA has maintained a free website of all public notices www.NJpublicNotices.com, providing NJ citizens searchable access to both current and archived public notices since November 2002.
- In the NJPA database, public notices are translatable into numerous languages including Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Chinese, and over 100 others.
- The website is completely 'smart searchable' by town, category of public notice and date, etc.
- Users may also sign up for email notifications based on keywords they provide.

All New Jersey public notices are already online, cont.

- www.NJPublicNotices is a secure site.
- A printed record of a public notice in a newspaper is an important document in any governmental or legal proceedings. It is evidence a public notice has not been altered and was published on the correct date.
- There is no cost to users or towns and counties for the online service.
- New Jersey residents currently have one place to go for all public notices instead of having to search multiple town and other government websites.

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Not all New Jersey residents use the Internet

- According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau, 1.8 million New Jersey residents do not use the Internet. That's 22% of the state's population (see next page).

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Not all New Jersey residents use the Internet, cont.

(In thousands.)

Selected characteristics	Total Population 3 years and older	Individual accesses the Internet from some location ²		# of NJ individuals who do not access the Internet from some location	
	#	#	%	#	%
New Jersey	8,428	6,588	78%	1,840	22%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 2012.

Internet Release date: January 2014.

¹ "Some location" means Internet access that occurs either inside or outside the respondent's home.

² At least one member of the individual's household reported using the Internet from home.

Public Notice rates are low

- The statutorily controlled rates, for what amounts to “government transparency services,” have not increased in 33 years.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of labor statistics the rate of inflation since 1983 is 143%. In other words a 1983 dollar is now \$2.43.
- For New Jersey newspapers, public notice rates are by far the lowest rates they charge.

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Government transparency and the public

- Government has an obligation to maintain its creditability and good standing with the public.
- Online-only legal public notices would be subject to change, deletion and other actions by unscrupulous individuals. New opportunities for corruption would also result.
- Independent third-party operation provided by newspaper-media provides essential credibility to the system of public-notification.
- Taking public notices out of newspapers and disenfranchising 22% of the state's population creates the opposite effect of maintaining government transparency.

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Factors to consider

- A financially strained industry.
- Layoffs and newspaper closures.
- Diminished news coverage.
- Cost to towns. Lack of a thorough cost analysis to determine the total, actual costs to government.
- All NJ public notices are already online. Translatable. Convenient for residents to have them in local print, and all in one place at www.NJpublicNotices.com.

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Factors to consider, cont.

- Legal advantage of having a printed record of a public notice.
- 1.8 million residents or 22% of the population do not use the Internet.
- Sustained, well-regulated transparency is vital to good government.

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