

House Political Subdivisions  
HB 1108  
9 a.m. Jan. 14, 2020

Chairman Dockter and Members of the Committee. I'm Jill Denning Gackle, publisher of the BHG newspapers, a group that serves town as far east as McClusky, as far west as Beulah and as far north as Garrison.

Please give HB 1108 a strong "no" vote. The bill would hide the county's most valuable information published in minutes of county meetings. In this day and age where we need more transparency, not less, let me give you an example.

Mercer County publishes its minutes in the Beulah Beacon. The Mercer County Commissioners talk a lot. The commissioners are often at odds with many votes that aren't unanimous. One county commissioner is calling for an audit of the books because he doesn't believe it's all above board. With pending tax increases and a \$2.5 million shortfall, the public is paying attention. Although a reporter of ours covers those meetings in details, we can't put every speck of information in our stories. The minutes fill that gap for the readers.

In December, the Mercer County Commission meetings took up 30 inches of one column in the Beulah Beacon. Within those 30 inches, 4 ½ inches raise some of the most interesting questions: Why is the county serving its vehicles in Bismarck (Eide Ford) when there are local mechanics? Why are they buying office supplies from Quill when local stores or even stores in the state sell office supplies? Whose cell phone bills does the county pay for to a tune of \$792/month? Why does one gas station get twice as much business as another?

These minutes are well read. And they're almost always read in print. Although we give a free online subscription with every paid print subscription, less than 15 percent of our subscribers take us up on it. They want a print subscription. They don't want to try to sit on a computer at the end of a day, they want to sit in their armchair and read the local news.

Newspapers remain a solid source for local information. In our communities we're the only source for local information, which creates a glue that brings our residents together. Let's give them all the information and not try to hide what our readers want and need.

Please vote "no" on HB 1108. Thank you for your consideration.

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