

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill #1380, which seeks to give counties the option of publishing minutes only on the county website. While I understand the desire for efficiency, it is critical that we preserve the longstanding practice of publishing county minutes in the official county newspaper.

Transparency in government is not just a principle; it is the foundation of trust between elected officials and the public. Publishing minutes in the local newspaper ensures that county business remains transparent and accessible to all residents, regardless of their digital access or literacy. Local newspapers serve as an established, trusted source of information for communities. Removing this requirement would significantly diminish the ability of many citizens to stay informed about county decisions.

In the most recent election, Burke County voters overwhelmingly expressed their support for maintaining the publication of county minutes in local newspapers. This outcome underscores the importance people place on keeping this vital information readily available and easily accessible. For many residents, especially the elderly, the local newspaper is their primary source of news and the only practical means of staying informed about county government.

It is important to note that many rural areas, including our county, have a substantial population of senior citizens who are not online. Relying exclusively on a county website to publish minutes would alienate these individuals and create a barrier to access.

Lastly, we must recognize the economic implications. Local newspapers, a cornerstone of our communities for generations, rely on public notices and legal publications to sustain their operations. In contrast, the amount of money spent on publishing these minutes is very minimal compared to the entire county budget. Diminishing their role not only reduces transparency but also threatens the viability of local journalism, which plays a critical role in holding government accountable.

In conclusion, House Bill #1380 would erode transparency and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations. I would like you to prioritize the public's right to know and reject this proposal. Let's respect the will of the voters and preserve the vital practice of publishing county minutes in the official county newspaper.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kristi Bohl, Publisher

Burke County Tribune

