

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Art Hagebock. I am the owner and publisher of four weekly newspapers in southeast North Dakota. They are the LaMoure Chronicle, Kulm Messenger, Litchville Bulletin, and the Enderlin Independent.

Please accept this testimony "AGAINST" HB 1380

I have been in the newspaper industry since 1980. I have owned my four newspapers since 2012. I also am very involved with my communities that I have papers in. I sit on the LaMoure Community Development Corporation board, St. Rose Care Center nursing home board, American Legion, LaMoure County Housing Authority board, LaMoure Chamber Retailers, James River Sportsman Club, and recently retired as the fire chief after fifteen years in that position. I attend every School Board, City Council, and County Commission meeting and report the stories in our papers. I do not tell you these things to be boisterous, I tell you this because I know how vital the local newspapers are to getting information out to the public. The public also expects my newspapers to give them all the public information they need and want. The web and social media are great tools for information but anytime anybody really wants to make sure that their information is seen, they put that information in their local newspaper.

I do not know if everyone understands the process of publishing minutes. At the county level, it is mandated that the minutes must be published and the voters pick which newspaper to publish them in. At the city and school level, the voters choose whether the minutes are published or not. The city council or school board then chooses which newspaper they will be published in.

In the last election, the voters voted 170 to 10 in favor of publishing the school's minutes in the newspaper. The city of LaMoure had 7 no votes to 105 yes votes to publish the minutes. Over 2,000 voters picked a newspaper to publish the county minutes in that last election in LaMoure County.

It is obviously clear that the voters want their government information readily available to them from the newspapers. They do not want to have to go hunt for it. I had to go through four different steps to get to where I could read this bill on the state's website. How many people would give up after the first couple of tries.

I go to these meetings, I see how much trouble these entities have in keeping their websites current. Who is going to monitor them? This bill is absolutely the wrong approach. If you want to give the option to the voters on what form of media they would like to get their information from, then let them decide. Do not dictate their wishes through this type of legislation.