

Sarah Elmquist Squires

North Dakota Newspaper Association

HB 1108

Against

Dear Chairman Dockter, Vice Chairwoman Pyle, and Reps. Adams, Cory, Ertelt, Fegley, Hatlestad, Johnson, Klemin, Longmuir, Nehring, Nelson, Simons, and Toman,

I'm writing today in opposition to HB 1108, which would remove the requirement of bill publication within minutes for our state's counties.

I think we can all agree that government should be accountable to taxpayers. Transparency of government spending is where the rubber hits the road when it comes to that key tenant of accountability. If citizens do not have access to these spending reports, folks will be in the dark when it comes to that oversight.

What happens when the lights are out when it comes to government spending? I'll tell you. Those "checks and balances" we take for granted disappear. Taxes go up. Government officials become looser with taxpayer dollars because they know no one is watching. That's not the direction North Dakotans want their government to go.

Taxpayers deserve the right to have access to these spending reports, no matter who they are. Yet we know that hiding them on government websites cuts out major segments of your constituents: 34% of seniors don't go online, and 22% of rural folks don't have access to the web. The vast majority of North Dakotans who do use the internet don't peruse government websites to find data; an independent survey we conducted last year proved it: nearly 90% of those surveyed said North Dakotas newspapers are where they go to find public notices. That's where they belong.

Publication of notices is not expensive, and in studying newspapers of various sizes over the last week, I can tell you the bill reports amount to less than 20% of the cost of publishing those minutes. The typical cost in Crosby for bill publication, for instance, is \$27. But how much do we save by ensuring there is oversight to that spending?

Taxpayer oversight of government spending is paramount to the kind of small, efficient and accountable government we expect and deserve. Please vote DO NOT PASS on HB 1108.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Elmquist Squires

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