

January 18, 2023

Chairman Longmuir and Members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee,

My name is Amy Wobbema, President of the North Dakota Newspaper Association and publisher of two weekly newspapers in central North Dakota - the New Rockford Transcript and the Foster County Independent.

I appear before you today to ask for your support on HB 1197, the Public Notice Modernization bill.

I've owned the New Rockford Transcript for seven years, and I've worked at the newspaper for eight. When I purchased the business in December 2015, the newspaper had no online presence other than a Facebook page with a couple hundred followers. I knew that had to change, as several other weekly newspapers already had e-editions and websites.

Within six months, I launched the first website and first e-edition of the Transcript. In 2018, I worked with a developer to build a new website for the newspaper, one that made all the public notices we published available online with no subscription required.

In 2019, the newspaper industry came before the legislature with a bill to require newspapers to publish all public notices across the state in one place online, to make them more accessible to the public.

I purchased the Foster County Independent in October 2021, and within three months I launched a website for the Independent, which also has a place where the public can access all our public notices with no subscription required.

The readership on both of our websites is increasing. While the majority of our readers still access news from their weekly newspaper in print, we do have a growing audience online and currently post breaking news stories there in between print editions.

I'm sharing this because I want you to know how newspaper publishers in North Dakota are changing with the times. You've heard about the daily newspapers that have reduced print editions while continuing to publish news daily online in their e-editions. While they don't have a print product every day, readers are still able to access news in real time, as well as a daily e-edition, online.

Right now about half of the weekly newspapers across the state publish a copy of their weekly print edition online as an e-edition. While I am not aware of any that publish additional e-editions beyond the facsimile of their weekly print product, I know that things can and will change, and publishers can see the opportunity in front of us.

HB 1197 is one more demonstration that the newspaper industry is looking ahead to the future, mindful that people consume news in different ways.

I respectfully ask for a “do pass” on HB 1197. Thank you for your time and consideration. I’d be glad to answer any questions.