

March 3, 2023

Senate State and Local Government Committee  
Re: House Bill 1197

Good morning Committee Chair Roers and members of the Senate State and Local Government Committee.

My name is Matt Von Pinnon. I'm editor of The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead, InForum.com, and a past president of the North Dakota Newspaper Association. I appreciate you letting me appear before you by remote access this morning.

I'm appearing today on behalf of NDNA in support of HB 1197, the Public Notice Modernization bill. It would extend the definition of publish to include a newspaper's e-edition, sometimes called an e-paper, allowing public notices to appear in digital e-editions.

The Forum is among four newspapers in the state proudly owned by North Dakota-based Forum Communications Co. All of our company's newspapers, including 16 more in Minnesota and South Dakota, publish one or two printed editions a week. But nearly all of our newspapers publish e-editions every day of the week. They look just like any other newspaper but are delivered electronically right to a reader's computer or smartphone.

When we first began publishing e-editions, we printed newspapers seven days a week as well. But as more and more readers became comfortable with e-editions, and some ultimately preferred them for a variety of reasons, the e-editions eventually became our primary delivery platform. While the printed newspaper is still fantastic and preferred by many, the e-editions allow for on-time delivery in any weather and in any location, and allow readers to zoom in or enlarge words for easier reading. In essence, e-editions have expanded our reach beyond the one-day distance limitations of delivery trucks.

And our company and our audience are not alone in seeing the great possibilities of this relatively new delivery platform. Many of the newspapers my colleagues operate are expanding their audiences by offering e-editions.

Which is why it seems logical to allow public notices to appear in digital e-editions. At The Forum, we still publish our public notices on print days, and I think that will continue for the foreseeable future, but the current requirement to do so limits the opportunities for those placing public notices and also for those reading them. I should also add that most newspapers, including ours, publish public notices on our websites that nonsubscribers can access free of charge. NDNA also has a free public notice website.

An independent survey done in 2020 found that nearly 9 out of 10 North Dakotans say they look to their local newspapers for public notices and they trust their newspapers for that service far more than government or non-government websites. This bill allows newspapers to continue serving readers that way, but with more flexibility in how that information is delivered.

I respectfully ask for a Do Pass recommendation on HB 1197. We appreciate your efforts to keep North Dakota public notices accessible.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.