

Testimony prepared for:
House Political Subdivisions
Donnell Preskey, NDACo
January 23, 2025



Re: HB 1380 – Publication Requirement

Chairman Longmuir and committee members, I'm Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. We are here in support of HB 1380 to amend the publication requirement for the printing of commission meeting minutes to allow for the county to instead publish on their website. This will save taxpayer dollars.

NDACo has attempted to amend publication requirements numerous times in recent sessions, and in that time, costs continue to rise. Now, counties are under even greater scrutiny for how taxpayer dollars are spent. In 2019, counties budgeted \$450,000 for publication requirements. A recent survey found that line item has grown to \$750,000 in 2024. And the harsh reality is that fewer people are subscribing to and reading the local newspaper in that timeframe. Costs have risen while the reach has decreased. This fact should cause pause. Is this the best use of taxpayer dollars?

While counties have numerous publication requirements that are included in the \$750,000 budget number – meeting minutes is typically the largest share of that cost. Estimates from counties show the expense of publishing the meeting minutes is about half to one-third of their publication budget.

The Office of Management and Budget negotiates and sets the rate for legal notices. County Auditors were notified in late 2024 that OMB is proposing increases of 3.25% in FY2026 and 3.25% in FY2027. That's an increase statewide of almost \$50,000 in two years. It is our position that if the cost of operating newspapers has increased, those costs should be passed on to the subscribers or advertisers not government entities.

OMB conducted a recent survey, which included County Auditors, regarding the proposed rate increase. A majority of auditors who responded shared negative comments about the rate increase. Citing the increased cost will put greater pressure on the limited property tax revenue available or lead to a property tax increase. In a survey, NDACo conducted to gather the publication budget information for 2024, there were several comments including: papers failing to publish the information when it is required, papers reducing how often printing, and the decrease in subscribers.

With an increased focus on limiting government spending at the local level – it is beyond time to look at these publication requirements. We ask you give HB 1380 a Do Pass Recommendation.