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A Message From Governor Chris Christie On Posting Legal Notices Online

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Tags: [Bill Action](#)

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today released the following opinion editorial on legislation being considered that would update mandates requiring certain legal notices to be published in newspapers. It can be found in full below or on [medium.com](#).

"On Thursday, the Legislature advanced a commonsense piece of legislation that was first proposed in 2004 and will reform the archaic practice of requiring taxpayers and private businesses to pay for costly legal notices in print newspapers. The legislation provides the option of posting notices online and citizens will be allowed to take advantage of modern technologies that are already in use by the vast majority of the people in our State.

"It also saves money.

"The current unfunded mandate that is being addressed by this legislation costs New Jersey taxpayers and private citizens more than \$80 million per year. That is \$80 million annually from property taxpayers, including those facing the nightmare of foreclosure.

"The taxpayers and citizens of New Jersey can no longer afford this arrangement and thanks to technology, they don't have to.

"In the case of foreclosures, every family going through that trauma is charged an average of \$910 just for the legally required newspaper notices. That is unconscionable and in response to the advancing legislation the New Jersey Press Association proposes increasing those charges.

"As a result, required legal notices earned newspapers approximately \$14 million for the 12-month period ending in October 2016. And these costs were borne by the 15,764 financially distressed people who had just suffered a foreclosure of their home in that time period. This is simply unacceptable.

"Today, there are more than 65,000 foreclosures currently pending in New Jersey. That's \$59 million in potential revenue going to private media outlets that can instead be saved by citizens experiencing a foreclosure. Giving them a choice to post online at no cost helps them prevent losing what little equity they may have left or sinking them further into debt.

"For government entities, hundreds of millions of dollars of future resources to be spent on required legal notices could now be made available for public schools and other municipal and county services rather than on an outmoded method which has been supplanted for the majority of New Jerseyans by the Internet.

"The NJ Press Association has acknowledged the inescapable truth – newspapers have a vested interest in seeing this reform movement fail, and it is why they are making baseless charges to support taxing homeowners and bilking those subject to foreclosure unnecessarily.

"For years newspapers have enjoyed a statutorily-protected monopoly on the publication of a vast array of legal notices. Monopolies are always bad for our economy and, in this case, awfully expensive for our citizens.

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"The facts are clear: nearly 90 percent of New Jersey households have an internet connection and 100 percent of the state's public libraries provide free internet access to their more than 43 million annual visitors. Only 22 percent of New Jerseyans buy a print newspaper. This reform will bring New Jersey government directly to the people, who primarily spend their time online accessing information - for free. According to a Pew Research Center study from this summer, 81 percent of adults get their news from online sources or through mobile devices.

"Contrary to the flailing assertions of the NJ Press Association, there will be no lack of transparency and no harm to the public as a result of this reform. These are merely scare tactics by their paid Trenton lobbyists designed to protect the interests of newspaper companies who argue for a free press, but are really arguing for a taxpayer funded subsidy in disguise. This bill, and their fight over it, unmasks their greed. In fact, their true disinterest in transparency and the public's access to information through a free press – not to mention their undeniable hypocrisy – are fully displayed by the fact that this op-ed was refused publication. I was therefore left with no choice but to disseminate this opinion myself, which will no doubt be read by a vast majority of the population online.

"The truth is this reform legislation maintains the requirement for local governments to provide advance public notice for matters such as meetings, agendas, bid requests and contract awards, while also establishing the requirements for public websites to ensure ease of access for the public. Government entities and individuals would still be able to fulfill notice obligations, but what would no longer be mandatory is the requirement of publishing an exorbitantly expensive notice in a newspaper.

"Although the NJ Press Association insists that this reform bill will result in an overwhelming burden for municipal staff, they intentionally ignore the basic facts. Most importantly, they ignore the fact that this legislation is optional. If municipal clerks can't manage to transfer the text of a legal notice and post it on their website, they are not required to change their process. However, 532 of the 565 municipalities in New Jersey already maintain websites that provide public notices and information – adding the legal notices that are currently published in newspapers will not be a major leap.

"The New Jersey Association of Counties, the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, the New Jersey Conference of Mayors and the New Jersey School Boards Association all support this bill. The only group raising alarms on behalf of municipalities is the NJ Press Association.

"In 2004, when a nearly identical bill was proposed, Assemblyman Wisniewski, then-Assemblyman (now Senator) Gordon, and then-Assemblywoman (now Senator) Weinberg voted for it. Yet now they have the chutzpah to turn their backs on the taxpayers they serve in order to further their misguided political agenda.

"We must update and modernize the public notification responsibilities of local government so that residents are fully informed and we eliminate the outrageous cost for the taxpayers of New Jersey. It will permit a greater number of citizens access to government. The NJ Press Association's attempts to hang on to an antiquated, self-serving, money making statutory scheme is shameful. The Constitution guarantees a free press, not a government-subsidized one.

"That is why I support this bill, and all taxpayers who don't have Trenton lobbyists arguing for government-ordered profit for them, should as well."

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