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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony SB 157 : Municipalities – Charter Amendments – Notice
February 7th
Senate Education, Energy, and Environmental Committee

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on SB 157, an act addressing Municipalities, Charter Amendments, and Notice.

I introduced SB 157 to give small municipalities the option to avoid the burden of having to pay the high cost of newspaper advertising for notifying their residents of proposed charter amendments when they could instead reach those same residents more directly and cheaper by mail or by hand delivery.

Under current law, if municipalities intend to amend their charter or if a charter amendment is proposed by referendum, they are required to publish notices in a “newspaper of general circulation that is available for sale for 4 straight weeks” in order to notify the public of the proposed charter modification. Municipalities with no local paper – like those in Montgomery County - are required to advertise in larger papers, such as the Washington Post. The cost to place an ad in a regional paper can be costly and inefficient.

For example, one of the municipalities in my district paid over \$2,000 for a 1 inch by 3 inch advertisement in a major paper in a classified section most likely overlooked by most of the village residents. The same jurisdiction printed the amendment in a readable form in their monthly newsletter, which is delivered to every home in the village, and on their website along with an explanation of the reasons for altering the Charter.

Residents were probably much more likely to read the jurisdiction’s newsletter than they were to view the Friday classifieds of the Washington Post—the only newspaper of general circulation left standing in their area. I believe this bill provides a common sense option to help our municipalities in certain areas save money, while most importantly, preserving the public notification requirement outlined in statute.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge a favorable report for SB 157.

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher Testimony - SB 157 - Ch

Uploaded by: Jeff Waldstreicher

Position: FAV

SENATOR JEFF WALDSTREICHER
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The Senate of Maryland
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Testimony of Senator Jeff Waldstreicher
Senate Bill 157 – Municipalities – Charter Amendments – Notice

February 7, 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan & Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Senate Bill 157 deals with an issue that most of us are familiar with. As many of you know, our municipal corporations need to provide certain notices in newspapers of record. This is an issue the General Assembly has been grappling with for many years as smaller newspapers in our communities have shuttered. These papers include the Montgomery County Sentinel and the Gazette.

Today, our municipalities must turn to larger newspapers – such as the Washington Post and the Baltimore Sun – to place their notices. This presents a couple of problems. First, very few people continue to receive physical newspapers, so these notices are not being seen. Second, as a result of their increased market share, these larger newspapers enjoy local monopolies over these legally mandated notices.

The General Assembly has considered past legislative proposals to move these notices online. The problem with these proposals – which I support in part – is that not everyone has access to the Internet. The digital divide could accidentally leave our most vulnerable citizens without access to information about the municipalities in which they reside. That’s why I worked with my local municipalities and the Maryland Municipal League to come up with a solution to our diminishing local newspapers.

Senate Bill 173 offers a straightforward remedy. If a municipality is considering a charter amendment, they can simply mail notification of that amendment to all their residents. They can also include it in a newsletter so long as the newsletter is mailed to all residents of the municipality. Senate Bill 173 would allow for personal delivery, as well.

This bill is a thoughtful, effective way for smaller municipalities to keep their resident apprised of charter amendments. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Waldstreicher".

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher

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Position: FAV



Testimony of the Mayor and Council of Rockville
SB 157: Municipalities – Charter Amendments – Notice
Support

The Mayor and Council of Rockville thank Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for the opportunity to provide comments on *SB 157: Municipalities – Charter Amendments – Notice*. We are grateful to Senator Waldstreicher for sponsoring this important legislation.

The Rockville Mayor and Council strongly support SB 157, as this legislation would provide needed relief for the City and other municipalities faced with increasingly high costs to notice proposed Charter Amendments, public hearings on planning and zoning issues, budgets, and other City business. It is unfortunate that no local newspaper has continued in Montgomery County and therefore the only option available to meet the noticing requirement is to place these legally required ads in a regional print newspaper which is quite expensive due to the limited options.

For Fiscal Year 2023, Rockville has already spent \$8,000 on legal noticing costs and the small size of the ads placed in the newspaper's classified listings can be easily overlooked. Fiscal Year 2022, Rockville spent more than \$16,000 on legal noticing costs. SB 157 begins to address these issues by expanding charter amendment noticing options to include a copy of a fair summary of the proposed charter amendment delivered either by hand or mail once to every municipal residence. Under SB 157, the requirement can also be met by including the notice in a newsletter or any other regular municipal publication.

SB 157 is a welcomed improvement to a costly, antiquated, and inefficient process. The Bill supports greater transparency and community engagement and would permit Rockville and other municipalities to expend more of our taxpayer resources on high-quality programs and services. For these reasons, we urge the Committee to provide SB 157 with a favorable report.