



# First Amendment FOUNDATION

Protecting Your Right to Know Since 1985

February 10, 2020

The Honorable Joe Gruters  
Florida Senate  
324 The Capitol  
404 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Re: HB 1340 – Publication of Legal Notices

Dear Senator Gruters:

I am writing to express the First Amendment Foundation's opposition to Senate Bill 1340, which provides for website publication of legal notices.

It is difficult to imagine that citizens will find important legal notices on agency websites so that they are able to inform themselves of important governmental decisions or meetings. How will they know what particular agency website to search, or when they should search that agency's website for a particular type of legal notice?

Most often, citizens learn about legal notices and notices of public meetings by reading about them in newspapers, whether those newspapers are published online or in print. While the way we receive news may be changing, the vast majority of Floridians still read newspapers everyday – some on online and still many via old-fashioned home delivery. It is a broad American practice to read newspapers over breakfast each morning – many now on their iPads or laptops, but still newspapers. That is the way citizens are accustomed to receiving notice of governmental change and open government meetings.

Because of the internet, public consumption of news via trusted media outlets is on the rise. And for many Floridians, the first trusted news source they turn to is their local newspaper.

Newspapers of local consumption is where governmental legal notices are expected to be, and **must** remain. That is where they are most accessible. And, bottom line: Legal notice to the public is integral to participatory democracy.

To justify this bill, supporters have suggested that this legislation will save local governments millions of dollars. Staff analysis, however, concludes that whether this bill will truly save money is "indeterminate." Saving governmental funds is certainly a worthy goal. However, limiting legal public notices by removing them to

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### JIM BALTZELLE, CHAIRMAN

Director Local Media, Southeast,  
*The Associated Press*

### GARY GREEN, VICE CHAIRMAN

Deputy News Editor and Digital Director,  
Innovation News Center

### FRANK DENTON, TREASURER

Retired Editor, *Florida Times-Union*

### PETE WEITZEL

Founder and Director Emeritus

### ANA-KLARA ANDERSON

Counsel, *NBC Sports – NBCUniversal Media*

### FARHOOD BASIRI

Co-Founder, Bellwether Software Development

### DICK BATCHELOR

Founder and President,

Dick Batchelor Management Group, Inc.

### MIKE DEESON

Deeson Media

### TRIMMEL GOMES

President, Gomes Media Strategies

### THOMAS D. HALL

President, TLH Consulting Group LLC

### AMY HOLLYFIELD

Senior Deputy Editor- News, *Tampa Bay Times*

### CAROL JEAN LOCICERO, CHAIRWOMAN

Thomas & LoCicero

### CINDY McCURRY-ROSS

Executive Editor & VP of Content, *The News-Press*

### SAMUEL J. MORLEY

General Counsel, Florida Press Association

### MATT PARCELL

News Director, Cox Media Group Orlando

### PATRICK RICE

Editor, *Daytona Beach News-Journal*

### DEAN RIDINGS

President & CEO, Intersect Media Solutions

### BOB SHAW

Retired Editor, *Orlando Sentinel*

### CAITIE SWITALSKI

Reporter, *WLRN Public Media*

### CHARLEY WILLIAMS

Past State Board,

League of Women Voters of Florida

Director, Business Development, GEC

### DAVE WILSON

Senior Editor, *The Miami Herald*

an obscure municipal agency's website is not a desirable way to save money in a country that prides itself on participatory democracy.

We are grateful for your time, work and consideration. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to call me at the number below.

Sincerely,



Pamela C. Marsh  
President

Cc: The Honorable Bill Galvano, President, The Florida Senate  
Mr. Jim Baltzelle, Associated Press, Chair, First Amendment Foundation  
Mr. Samuel Morley, General Counsel, Florida Press Association  
Ms. Lisa Nellesen Savage, Chair, Florida Society of News Editors

---