



TALKING POINTS

Thousands of laws in all 50 states of our nation require governmental and non-governmental entities to publish legal public notices in newspapers. They range from public budgets to public hearings to notices informing creditors of dissolving corporations.

- Public notices, along with public records and public meetings, are the foundations citizens depend on to tell the story in each community. **The goal is to ensure that the public is adequately informed of the actions of its government.**
 - **A recent survey of Virginia citizens conducted by DecideSmart found that 97% of the respondents in the survey said that the principle of the public's right to know what their government is doing and planning is either very important (79%) or somewhat important (18%).**
- Newspapers, along with their websites, are **the way most adults gather information** about their government.
- The survey conducted by DecideSmart also revealed that the majority of respondents think that newspapers are still the best place to publish public notices:
 - **94% of respondents said that keeping the citizenry informed of public notices/legal advertisements in newspapers is an important function of government agencies.**
 - **72% of respondents have not gone to a government website to read a public notice.**
 - **63% of respondents said that they would read public notices much less often (36%) or less often (27%) if these were placed only on government websites.**
- **52% of respondents** in the DecideSmart survey **gave public notices printed in newspapers one of the two highest ratings on the trust and credibility scale** compared to 31% of respondents who gave public notices printed on government websites one of the two highest ratings on the same scale.
- Many **areas of Virginia still do not have high-speed Internet** connections.
- **Electronic delivery of government websites is unreliable**, as reported in Virginia's newspapers on a regular basis.
- **Significant segments of the population do not go online, for reasons ranging from lack of access to computers to lack of connections.** These citizens would be disenfranchised by putting public notices solely online.
- Only about **one-half of one percent of operating expenditures is spent on public notices**, regardless of a locality's size. The costs of developing a secure website and posting notices would be far greater than the amounts most localities currently spend on public notices. Some localities in Virginia do not even have official websites, and many existing government websites do not offer extensive information or public access to documents.
- Notices published in a newspaper and on a news website reach **a broader pool of potential bidders**; notices published on a local government website reach fewer potential bidders, including minority businesses.
- There is no independence, no way to prove that a notice appeared or was available, and no way of providing that notice when the Internet is down or crashes. **Websites crash; newspapers don't.**
- **Once printed in a newspaper, a public notice cannot be changed.** Notices published online can be altered or manipulated, thus affecting the transparency of information available to citizens.