

February 27, 2026

Esteemed Chairs Rahman and Kavros Degraw,
Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill 5289, *An Act Concerning the Publication of Municipal Legal Notices*.

WestCOG has formally adopted as a legislative priority allowing municipalities to meet legal notice requirements online instead of through mandatory newspaper publication. This bill represents a necessary and long-overdue modernization of Connecticut's statutory notice framework.

I. NEWSPAPER PUBLICATION IS NO LONGER EFFECTIVE PUBLIC NOTICE

The purpose of legal notice is to ensure transparency, public awareness, and democratic legitimacy. Yet newspaper circulation has declined dramatically over the past two decades. Publication in a print newspaper, whether daily or weekly, is no longer a reliable mechanism for informing the public. In many communities, only a small percentage of residents subscribe to or regularly read print newspapers. Legal notices, often printed in dense type and grouped together without context, are unlikely to come to the attention of residents or businesses with an interest in the subject matter. We should not confuse historical practice with functional effectiveness. The goal of public notice is not preservation of a medium; it is meaningful public awareness.

II. MEETING THE PUBLIC WHERE IT ACTUALLY IS

Residents, businesses, contractors, and civic organizations now obtain information online. If Connecticut is committed to fostering informed participation and transparent governance, public notice requirements must reflect contemporary communication practices. Online posting allows:

- Immediate access at any time;
- Searchable archives;
- Email notification subscriptions;
- Hyperlinks to full supporting documents, maps, specifications, and reports;
- Clear presentation in plain language and accessible formats.

These features are not available in traditional newspaper notices. Updating notice requirements strengthens democratic legitimacy by expanding, not constraining, public access.

III. STATEWIDE PORTALS EXPAND ACCESS AND IMPROVE COMPETITION

Connecticut has already invested in robust statewide platforms such as CTsource and CTjobs. These portals:

- Are searchable across municipal boundaries;
- Allow vendors and contractors to subscribe for notifications;
- Provide broader visibility than any single local newspaper;
- Enable posting of full bid documents and supporting materials;

- Create a transparent, centralized record of procurement activity.

Allowing municipalities to meet statutory notice requirements through posting on statewide portals such as CTsource or CTjobs would significantly expand the pool of potential bidders and vendors. Greater competition leads to better pricing, improved contractor selection, and more efficient use of taxpayer funds. WestCOG respectfully recommends that the bill explicitly permit municipalities to satisfy notice requirements through approved statewide portals in addition to, or in lieu of, municipal websites. A centralized option promotes uniformity, equity, and technical consistency across the state.

IV. REDUCING FOIA BURDENS THROUGH PROACTIVE TRANSPARENCY

Municipalities are increasingly subject to Freedom of Information Act requests relating to procurements and public actions. Responding to these requests consumes substantial staff time and taxpayer-funded resources. If required notices and associated materials were consistently posted on centralized, searchable platforms, much of this labor-intensive work could be avoided. Proactive digital publication enhances transparency while reducing administrative burden. The frequency of procurement-related FOIA requests demonstrates that newspaper legal notices are not effectively informing the public. Online publication would materially improve access.

V. ELIMINATING ARTIFICIAL PROCESS DELAYS

Newspaper publication introduces procedural delays that have real financial consequences. Municipalities must often meet multi-day lead times to place legal notices in print. These delays slow:

- Procurement timelines;
- Public hearings;
- Project approvals;
- Bond authorizations; and
- Time-sensitive municipal actions.

Online posting eliminates these artificial lead times. Statutorily required notice periods can begin immediately upon posting, without waiting for print cycles. This increases efficiency, reduces carrying costs on projects, and avoids unnecessary delays that ultimately increase taxpayer expense.

VI. STRENGTHENING FISCAL STEWARDSHIP

Mandatory newspaper publication imposes significant recurring costs on municipalities. In an era of tight budgets and increasing service demands, local governments should not be required to expend scarce public funds on a communication method that does not effectively reach the public. Modernizing notice requirements is consistent with responsible fiscal stewardship and prudent management of taxpayer resources.

VII. ACCESSIBILITY AND ADA COMPLIANCE

Online publication offers important accessibility advantages. Municipal websites and statewide portals can be structured to meet federal accessibility standards, including compatibility with screen readers, adjustable text sizing, and multilingual translation tools. Newspaper publication

offers none of these accommodations. Individuals with visual impairments or language barriers may face greater difficulty accessing printed notices. Modernizing notice requirements therefore improves accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring broader public participation.

VIII. ARCHIVAL PERMANENCE AND SEARCHABILITY

Digital publication creates a durable, searchable public archive. Residents, businesses, journalists, and researchers can retrieve prior notices easily, improving institutional memory and public accountability. Newspaper notices, by contrast, are ephemeral. They are not easily searchable, are not uniformly archived in accessible formats, and often require paid access to retrieve. Online publication strengthens the long-term transparency of municipal decision-making.

IX. EMERGENCY RESILIENCY

Recent years have demonstrated the importance of resilient communication systems. Severe weather events and other emergencies can disrupt print distribution and physical access to newspapers. Online publication provides greater continuity and resilience. Notices can be accessed from any location with internet connectivity, including mobile devices, ensuring uninterrupted public access even during disruptive events.

X. EQUITY FOR SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES

Centralized statewide posting options are especially important for smaller municipalities with limited administrative and technical capacity. A standardized portal reduces duplication, simplifies compliance, and ensures that all communities—regardless of size—can meet notice requirements efficiently. Uniform statewide platforms promote equity in access to information across Connecticut’s municipalities.

XI. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reducing reliance on mandatory print publication also has environmental benefits. Newspaper production, printing, and physical distribution consume paper, ink, and fuel. While newspapers will continue to operate independently, eliminating statutory mandates for print publication where digital alternatives are more effective reduces unnecessary resource consumption. Modernizing public notice requirements aligns with broader sustainability goals and responsible resource use.

XII. ENSURING LEGAL CLARITY AND MUNICIPAL PROTECTION

WestCOG strongly supports the direction of Raised Bill 5289. To ensure smooth implementation and reduce litigation risk, we respectfully recommend that the Committee consider clarifying that:

- Online publication fully satisfies statutory notice requirements;
- Posting on a municipal website or approved statewide portal is legally sufficient;
- Certification by the municipal clerk creates a presumption of valid notice; and
- Technical outages beyond municipal control do not invalidate proceedings.

These refinements would ensure modernization reduces costs and increases transparency without introducing unintended procedural vulnerabilities.

XIII. CONCLUSION

Legal notice requirements exist to inform the public, uphold transparency, and protect democratic legitimacy. In today's communications environment, mandatory newspaper publication no longer reliably serves those objectives.

Raised Bill 5289 represents a pragmatic, responsible, and necessary update to Connecticut law. By allowing municipalities to meet notice requirements online, particularly through centralized statewide platforms such as CTsource and CTjobs, the state can:

- Expand access,
- Improve transparency,
- Increase competition in procurement,
- Reduce administrative burden,
- Eliminate unnecessary delays,
- Improve stewardship of taxpayer dollars,
- Enhance accessibility,
- Strengthen archival permanence,
- Increase emergency resiliency,
- Promote municipal equity, and
- Support environmental sustainability.

WestCOG respectfully urges the Committee to support this legislation and stands ready to assist in refining its language to ensure clarity and successful implementation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Pickering". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Francis R. Pickering
Executive Director