

Research Plan: Public Chapter 1137, Acts of 2026, Public Notice

Research Director: Leah Eldridge

Project Lead: Bob Moreo

Support:

Deputy Executive Director Approval: Initial: *MMB* Date: June 1, 2026

Executive Director Approval: Initial: *CML* Date: June 1, 2026

Purpose

To study the efficiency and effectiveness of different public notice methods.

Background

Public notice is the legal requirement for governments to inform the public about official actions, decisions, elections, and meetings that may affect them. Public notice requirements are intended to promote transparency by giving people advance notice, so they have an opportunity to participate, comment and stay informed. Tennessee law requires many public notices to be published in newspapers. In 2014, state law was amended to require newspapers to publish public notices not only in print editions, but also on their websites and on a statewide public notice website maintained by the Tennessee Press Association. In 2024, the law was amended again to require that public notices be published on a separate news and information website, if available, in addition to publication in a newspaper, on the newspaper's website and on the statewide public notice website.

Tennessee law requires that notices be published in print newspapers as methods of news consumption have changed over time. National survey data from the Pew Research Center show how much has changed. In a 1996 Pew survey, 72% of respondents reported regularly reading a daily newspaper, while only 12% reported getting news online. By 2025, 7% of respondents reported they often got their news from a print newspaper, while 56% reported getting news from digital devices often and 21% reported often getting news from social media.

Placing public notices in newspapers also creates recurring costs for local governments. These expenses involve the use of public funds for a communication method that may

differ from how some people now access information. Changes in media consumption patterns have prompted discussion about the comparative cost, reach, accessibility, and effectiveness of different print and digital notice methods.

In response to these issues, Senator Powers and Representative Crawford introduced Senate Bill 2450 and House Bill 2114 in the General Assembly. As introduced, this bill would have authorized local governments to satisfy public notice requirements by posting public notices on a local government or third-party website rather than in a newspaper. It was later amended to direct the commission to perform a study to determine whether newspapers remain the most efficient and effective manner for governments to provide public notice. The amended bill was passed by the 114th General Assembly and became Public Chapter 1137, Acts of 2026.

Define the Problem

Tennessee's public notice requirements still rely heavily on newspapers, even as news consumption shifts online, raising questions about which methods most effectively reach the public while using resources efficiently.

Assemble Some Evidence

- Review the referred legislation, Public Chapter 1137, Acts of 2026, to determine what it asks the commission to study and review any other related legislation
- Interview the sponsors of the legislation, Senator Powers and Representative Crawford, and any other members of the General Assembly who have shown interest in the bill
- Interview stakeholders including but not limited to
 - Local governments
 - Tennessee Municipal League
 - Tennessee County Services Association
 - Tennessee Press Association
 - Public Notice Resource Center
 - Governmental entities in other states
 - Newspaper publishers
 - Tennessee Coalition for Open Government
- Review Tennessee's statutes governing public notice.
- Review relevant federal statutes and regulations.

- Review other states' laws governing public notice.
- Gather relevant data sets, including statistics related to
 - How the number of newspapers in Tennessee and their publication frequency has changed over time,
 - How the number of newspaper subscribers as a percentage of population has changed over time,
 - Costs of online public notice platforms, and
 - How much taxpayer money is spent on newspaper publication requirements in the state.
- Review relevant literature on public notice requirements.

Proposed Research Timeline

- Problem statement and research plan (May 2026)
- Research
 - Assemble evidence (May-December 2026)
 - Construct alternatives and select criteria (January 2027)
 - Project outcomes, confront trade-offs, and select draft recommendations (January-February 2027)
- Storyboard, outline, and write the report (February-March 2027)
- Draft report to the commission for comments (Spring 2027 commission meeting)
- Final report to commission for approval (Summer 2027 commission meeting)



State of Tennessee

PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 1137

SENATE BILL NO. 2450

By Powers

Substituted for: House Bill No. 2114

By Crawford, Cepicky

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 1, Chapter 3 and Title 8, Chapter 44, relative to public notices.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. The Tennessee advisory commission on intergovernmental relations (TACIR) shall conduct a study to determine if newspapers of general circulation remain the most efficient and effective manner for governments to provide the public with transparent and accessible information. TACIR shall also examine how the efficiency of public notice methods has changed historically as part of the study.

SECTION 2. TACIR shall further study how the public has historically obtained its news and information compared to today. This comparison must include how the number of newspapers has changed in Tennessee, how their publication frequency has changed, and whether the number of subscribers as a percentage of the population has changed historically.

SECTION 3. TACIR shall examine the ability of governmental entities to create public notice systems, including their ability to maintain permanent public archives, protect against data corruption, and ensure independent verification of publication. This examination must also include the review of the costs associated with governmental entities maintaining online public notice platforms.

SECTION 4. TACIR shall review all governmental and public entities to determine the amount of taxpayer money used to meet newspaper publication requirements in this state. The study shall also examine whether citizens should be required to pay a subscription fee to access information that is intended to provide notice and transparency of governmental actions.

SECTION 5. TACIR shall study how the availability of broadband access in states, especially in rural communities, affects the publication of online public notices.

SECTION 6. TACIR shall review public notice practices in other states and any available trends or advances in technology. The review must include whether any new practices have affected transparency, government accountability, the impact on rural communities, or civic participation in those states.

SECTION 7. TACIR shall consult with interested parties regarding all issues cited in this study. The interested parties include, but are not limited to, local governments, newspaper publishers, the Tennessee Press Association, representatives from rural communities, governmental entities in other states that use online public notice, and open government advocates.

SECTION 8. TACIR may request information and input from state and local governmental entities, as necessary, and such entities must comply with TACIR's request. The study must be conducted from TACIR's existing resources.

SECTION 9. Upon completion of the study, TACIR shall report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the chair of the state and local government committee of the senate and the chair of the committee of the house of representatives having

jurisdiction over subject matters pertaining to state and local government, and provide a copy of the report to the legislative librarian. The report may be delivered electronically.

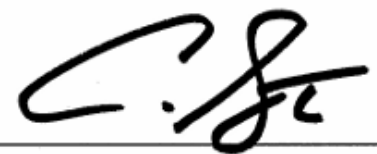
SECTION 10. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

SENATE BILL NO. 2450

PASSED: April 22, 2026



RANDY McNALLY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE



CAMERON SEXTON, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 22nd day of May 2026



BILL LEE, GOVERNOR