



STATE OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Wes Moore

May 23, 2024

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the House of Delegates
H-101 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Speaker Jones:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have vetoed House Bill 1258 - *Estates and Trusts - Estate Administration - Publication of Notice*.

This legislation is intended to modernize public notice requirements regarding estate administration, and thereby ease burdens on those required to seek publication of such notices. Such public notice requirements exist in multiple parts of Maryland statute, and have historically played an important role in ensuring that the public is aware of vital legal and governmental information. As technology has changed and information has become more widely available through the internet, however, it has increasingly become possible to provide such public notice through non-print means. And existing print public notice requirements do present a financial burden on local and state governments as well as individual citizens. This is the challenge that Delegate Embry was seeking to address, and I commend her and Registers of Wills across the state for their efforts to find a solution to the issue. The cost to families and government of public notice provisions such as those repealed by the House Bill 1258 is an important concern, and one which should be dealt with.

However, there is also a vital public interest in ensuring the existence of thriving independent local media. In fact, democracy can not function effectively in the absence of a free press that provides objective information to the citizenry about crucial events in government and in our communities. The press also plays an important role in public accountability through investigative journalism. Public notice requirements have helped sustain much of the local print media in Maryland as print advertising dollars have dried up and the entire print media industry has consolidated and downsized. Many communities in the state now suffer from a lack of press coverage of local news, undermining public accountability. To so rapidly remove such a large

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source of advertising revenue as estate notices without considering the impact on the future of local media in Maryland could have severe consequences.

Unfortunately, legislators were not given the opportunity during the 2024 legislative session to balance these two significant public interests, as representatives of the newspaper industry failed entirely to engage in public hearings, testimony, or conversations about the bill. During the legislative session it is imperative that advocates present their arguments for or against a policy to ensure that legislators and members of the public can be fully informed on an issue. The fact that industry representatives did not engage with House Bill 1258 undermines the legislative process, and is a disservice to all parties involved by not allowing robust conversation and creation of broader policy solutions that address all public interests. The administration hopes that in the future, representatives of the industry will be more actively involved in legislative debates.

This veto should not be seen as the end of the conversation, and in fact the administration believes we need a broader conversation about public notices rather than a conversation focused solely on estate notices. Our administration looks forward to engaging with Del. Embry and all of the advocates on that topic during the interim.

However, in the meantime, as I believe that a broader conversation is necessary and that a hasty transition in public notice requirements should be avoided, I have vetoed House Bill 1258.

Sincerely,



Wes Moore
Governor