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Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

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Comments to the Honorable Ralph Massullo, Jr., Chair, and members of the House State Affairs Committee regarding HB 7049 --- Legal Notices

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit, taxpayer research institute & government watchdog which, for more than 41 years, has worked to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

Fundamental to any effort to ensure accountability is access to information. There is a reason that the Florida Constitution requires all meetings of a county, municipality, school board, or special district where public business is to be discussed be properly noticed and open to the public. Citizens must be aware of what is afoot if they hope to keep local officials accountable.

You don't have to go far before you hear **community members anxious to preserve the rights of parents, businesses, and taxpayers** worried about government actions. Legal notices that Floridians need full access to include the notice of meetings and hearings; proposed budgets, tax rates, and TRIM notices; school district reports and orders; zoning, annexation, and land use changes; delinquent tax lists; tax deed sales and government property sales; government contracts; and public bids. When you consider the impact of these issues, you understand the need for vigilance. **Compromising the access to legal notices compromises accountability.**

The PCB before you will allow local government to post public notices on their website in lieu of newspapers. While we support efforts to modernize, this should not come at the exclusion of print strategies, especially since there are challenges with government posting public notices on their website, including hurdles of ease of use, transparency, and the digital divide.

Last month, Florida TaxWatch released its report, [*Closing the Digital Divide: The Expansion of Broadband Internet Services to Unserved Areas of the State*](#). While Florida boasts a strong overall ranking for broadband access, there are still significant portions of unserved and underserved Floridians who find themselves trapped in internet deserts. Notably, **more than 460,000 Floridians today do not have a wired connection capable of 25 megabits per second.** It is a positive step that the PCB contemplates the question of broadband penetration; however, other questions of access and functionality should be considered before changes are finalized.

Removing access to critical legal notices currently found in newspapers can have a material impact on the lives of citizens. This action would **disproportionately impact individuals and business in underserved areas, especially those in rural communities and minorities across the state.**

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues on addressing the issue as it proceeds through the process. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and, most of all, thank you and your family for your selfless public service to our state's taxpayers.