

Massachusetts House of Representatives

Bill Summary

Bill #: H.4510

Title: An Act relative to digital legal notices for the town of Plymouth

Sponsor: Rep. Michelle Badger and Rep. Kathleen LaNatra

Committee: Municipalities and Regional Government

Hearing Date: September 23 through September 30, 2025 written testimony hearing

Current Law: MGL Chapter 4, Section 13 (b) states “If a person, corporation, state agency, including its political subdivisions, a state authority, including its political subdivisions, municipality, including its political subdivisions, or other legal entity is required by a statute, ordinance, by-law or judicial order to publish a legal notice in a newspaper or newspaper of general circulation, the person, corporation, agency, authority, municipality or other legal entity shall publish said notice in a newspaper which shall ensure that the legal notice appears in: (i) a newspaper's print publication; (ii) on the newspaper's website; and (iii) on a statewide website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices; provided, however, that if a newspaper does not maintain its own website, publication on a statewide website and reference to the statewide website in the print publication notice shall satisfy the requirement of publication on the newspaper's website.”

Mass. General Laws Chapter 40A, Section 11 requires that public notices of public hearings be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the city or town for two weeks in a row, with the first publication occurring not less than 14 days before the hearing. The notice must also be posted in a conspicuous location in the city or town hall 14 days before the hearing.

The law also provides for mailing such hearing notices to the parties of interest (those affected by the subject of the hearing) but does not include any provision for publishing such notices on a website.

Summary: Section 1 of the bill exempts the town of Plymouth from any contrary provisions contained in Section 13 of MGL Chapter 4, providing that whenever the town, the public schools, a town officer, department, board, committee or commission is required by law or judicial order to publish a legal notice in a newspaper, such a requirement may be satisfied by using one or more of the following methods:

- (i) publishing in a newspaper of local or general print circulation;
- (ii) on the website of an online news site reporting local news and opinion;
- (iii) on an official town of Plymouth website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices; or
- (iv) on a website maintained as a statewide repository for such notices.

Section 2 contains a provision stating that nothing in the act shall be construed to alter or amend the timing requirements for publishing legal notices as provided by statute, bylaw, or a judicial order.

Section 3 provides for this special act to take effect upon its passage.

Notes: Language approved by the April 5, 2025 Spring Annual Town Meeting as Article 29 by a vote of 137 Yes and 1 No.