

Massachusetts House of Representatives

Bill Summary

Bill #:	H.5578
Title:	An Act allowing print-free digital legal notices for the town of Topsfield
Sponsor:	Rep. Kristin Kassner and Rep. Sally Kerans
Committee:	Municipalities and Regional Government
Hearing Date:	July 22, 2026
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.” Subsection (c) of section 13 governs website operators and sets six criteria for digital publication: (i) continuous public access; (ii) full text of legal notices in a searchable format during the posting period; (iii) substantial compliance with accessibility standards; (iv) free viewing and search access, with a carveout permitting newspaper websites to charge for enhanced features; (v) a 90-day archive of legal notices after they come off the active page; and (vi) no website-publication fee in excess of the print-publication fee. 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.
Summary:	Section 1 exempts the town of Topsfield from any contrary provisions contained in Section 13 of MGL Chapter 4, providing that whenever the town or its boards, committees, commissions, departments or offices are required by

general or special law, by-law or judicial order to publish a legal notice in a newspaper, such a requirement may be satisfied by posting or publishing the notice using any of the following methods:

- (a) in a print newspaper of local or general circulation;
- (b) on a newspaper website;
- (c) on a website that reports local news and opinion that satisfy all criteria for digital publication as enumerated in Section 13(c) of Chapter 4;
- (d) on a statewide website maintained as a repository for such notices; or
- (e) on an official town website that may be maintained as a 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 in the general laws.

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

Notes:

The home rule petition language was approved as Article 41 at the May 5, 2026 annual town meeting; declared passed by unanimous vote.