

The Gallatin  
County News

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## Local newspapers put communities first

Every county in Kentucky has one local business that has been there longer than any other, most more than a century – while some are even closing in on two centuries. In many of these counties, that business is their local newspaper.

I manage two of those local newspapers. *The Oldham Era* has been in operation for 149 years and is looking forward to celebrating our 150th next year. *The Henry County Local* has been publishing 168 proud years and counting. I also assist regionally with 13 other area newspapers with similar tenures.

Newspapers are the heartbeat of every community in Kentucky. We exist to inform, to raise awareness, to build community, to be the voice of those that can’t always speak for themselves, to cover local government and hold local officials accountable, to help local businesses grow, to enact change, to celebrate achievements and to archive our community’s history.

Our founding fathers felt so strongly about the importance of newspapers and the role we play in communities that we are the only profession explicitly named in the Constitution of the United States of America.

There are three ways in which newspapers have effectively carried out some of our most important roles - covering local government, keeping officials accountable, keeping citizens informed and helping transparency exist: public notices, open meetings and open records.

Without these three in place, knowing how your tax dollars are being spent, what bids are available and being rewarded, what decisions your elected officials are making for you, when meetings are being held and what new ordinances are being considered would not be as easily accessible.

There is currently a bill, HB368, that seeks to remove legal notices from newspapers and place them on government websites. Websites that are run by the government themselves.

What could go possibly go wrong with that?

When a legal ad is placed in a newspaper, it is placed in the local newspaper, dated and cannot be changed after the fact. In addition, it is placed on a website managed by the Kentucky Press Association where all legal notices in Kentucky can be found easily – kypublicnotices.com.

HB368 seeks to have entities including county and city governments place public notices on their own websites, yet many have only one employee, if any, and can’t even keep their current websites updated. I found one city website in my area that hadn’t been updated with meetings or ordinances since 2020. Two others had very little information, none of the council members were current and the monthly meeting time listed was listed wrong.

Officials have said they would create their own statewide website for all notices. I would argue that they are going to spend a lot more money creating a website we have already created and maintained successfully. Right now, paid legal notices are currently a very small part of county and city budgets – only 0.16%.

So why change? Is this what is really best for the community?

In counties of 80,000 or more a bill was passed in Kentucky to change the rules of public notices due to the cost of the larger newspapers. Yet, many of those counties, including Boone, Campbell, Fayette, Kenton, Madison and Warren, have decided that newspapers are still the best way to get their notices out and have continued to place them in newspapers despite the change.

Regardless of the county size, public notices should be posted by a third party, and with a newspaper in almost every county (and statewide website already in place) it just makes good, common sense.

Besides the concerns I’ve already addressed, while legal notices are not the only revenue that keep newspapers going – it is a part of it, and some smaller, rural counties will probably lose their local newspaper if this bill is passed. A community without a local newspaper is a community without a heartbeat, and countless studies have shown in news deserts across this country that there will be negative, long-term effects for the community.

No, it is not the job of the legislature to keep newspapers running but why are they so against doing something that maintains transparency and at the same time, would hurt some of the oldest local businesses in this state?

I’m not blind to the criticism of the media and think that cable news networks have hurt our industry as a whole. I was trained that a journalist is to cover the facts and to try and keep any biases out. I think your local newspapers do a pretty darn good job at still doing that. We have opinion/editorial pages that are open for opinions to be shared and topics to be discussed but they are clearly labeled and kept separate from the news content.

Your local newspaper employees are not pushing an agenda. We are actively involved and serving in our communities. We live, work, play and volunteer right alongside our community members. We take our role very seriously, and that includes publishing your public notices.

Any bill that seeks to change how public notices are handled, or diminishes public meetings or public records, is going to be harmful to the community, and your local newspaper, in the long run. I urge you to stand up with your local newspaper and help us keep these three in place.

By Jane Ashley Pace  
2024 KPA President

Jane Ashley Pace is the publisher of the *Oldham Era* and *Henry County Local*, regional advertising manager for *Paxton Media* and the 2024 president of the *Kentucky Press Association*.

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## Wildcat worries

**Gallatin County’s mascot had plenty to cheer about and feel worried about during last week’s District Tournament. Here, the big cat hangs its head during the Eminence game but not for long. The Wildcats rallied to win the semi-final 61-44. Photo by Kelley Warnick**

# Kentucky Commentary

## House Bill 4 would hurt Kentucky

By Melanie Jones Gast,  
Kristin Sajadi, and James Orlick  
NKyTribune

As March begins, the sun shines a little higher in the sky. Students, faculty, and staff from diverse social backgrounds and residential locations intermix in quads, libraries, hospitals, and buildings across Kentucky’s college campuses.

However, looming over college campuses and the future of higher education are bills like House Bill 4. What does HB4 mean for higher education in Kentucky? HB4 claims to focus on vaguely defined “diversity, equity, and inclusion” initiatives. HB4 has much broader implications for university competitiveness and systems fostering innovation, understanding, creativity, and success in higher education.

HB4 will have chilling effects on degrees, scholarships, research, classroom dialogue, professional-development and career initiatives, mentoring, and other essential training and support systems integral to Kentucky’s economy and education. HB4’s vague language will cause chaos and uncertainty—and fiscal waste—creating an avalanche of lawsuits that could cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

As we have seen in Texas, where 14 institutions closed 21 offices and eliminated hundreds of positions, HB4 will affect thousands of Kentucky university employees. Students, athletes, researchers, faculty, and higher-education leaders, along with scientists, nurses, doctors, lawyers, counselors, teachers, and more will leave Kentucky or approach our state with fear and unease, as they have begun to do in Florida and Texas.

HB4’s required “intellectual freedom” survey will create cost and other burdens, data-validity problems, and the potential for political misuse. The chilling effects of HB4 and similar legislation threaten the funding and vitality of programs, resources, grants, and financial aid, impacting diverse students and employees. For example, offices and departments have already

begun to dismantle courses, programming, and content out of fear of retribution.

HB4 poses problems for program accreditation, impacting dental, medical, nursing, law, Social Work, education, clinical psychology, urban planning, and many other students. Fields like dermatology advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in education and training to help health-care providers avoid misdiagnosing and mistreating diverse patients. Without DEI in such training, the citizens of Kentucky are at risk.

Proponents of HB4 frame “DEI” initiatives as “discriminatory,” arguing that they only benefit certain groups and lead to the hiring and recruitment of under-qualified individuals and students. However, this argument falls flat in the face of evidence. Higher education trains future workers and diverse workforces consistently outperform their competitors. .

Imagine that you or your child will enter college soon in Kentucky. Consider these questions: If HB4 passes, how will colleges promote belonging, innovativeness, intellectual curiosity and debate, dialogue, skill development, and social and historical awareness in a climate where university members face escalated uncertainties over retaliation and lawsuits? In classrooms, workshops, and mentor-

ing circles, how can we work toward equitable, accessible, and inclusive learning environments? How will programs prepare students for working in diverse and inclusive settings? How will colleges maintain rankings and attract and retain diverse students, athletes, researchers, faculty, and professionals and ensure their success?

HB4 hinders Kentucky’s higher education for diverse future generations. HB4 restricts our vital professions, research, and funding and the success of students and employees in the Commonwealth. Despite HB4’s many exemptions, HB4 will have chilling effects on scholarships, training, grants, and other resources and opportunities, stripping essential support systems and funding streams necessary for inclusive academic and work environments and student and employee success.

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