



DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20TH DISTRICT

For Immediate Release:
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Senator Stroebel Written Testimony on Assembly Bill 70

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Brooks and the committee for hearing testimony on Assembly Bill 70. I am sure many of you have heard from constituents, local newspapers, and local officials on this bill. In the contacts received by my office, there seems to be some confusion about what this bill actually does.

You may have seen the advertisements in your local paper claiming the public's "right to know is going away." This narrative is false. This bill **does not** shield the public from government proceedings (meeting minutes). The bill requires all meeting minutes to be published in the local newspaper OR as an alternative, in a public place and on a website maintained by the local government board.

The bill allows any local government to maintain their current relationship with the local newspapers. The bill simply offers an alternative to costly newspaper publications.

I would remind the committee that in many cases newspapers require subscriptions or payment at a newsstand to read any published material – including the minutes newspapers claim is "your right to know."

All meeting minutes remain public records. Under Wisconsin's public record law, an individual must receive the record if they request it. Many local government clerks are more than willing to create email lists, mailing lists, or other alternatives for those interested in receiving the proceedings on a regular basis.

Local units of government are willing to provide any proceeding document free of charge to any requestor. Are newspapers willing to offer the same service? Most likely these minutes remain behind a paywall. Newspapers seem to be concerned about the revenue, not providing a service. Under free market principles, newspapers must provide content their readers want or risk losing readers.

In Wisconsin, there are currently many types of proceedings that are not included in publication requirements. For example, the record of committee proceedings (ROCP) from today's hearing will not be published in the State's newspaper of record. Nonetheless, the proceedings are available on the legislature's website, the chairman's office, the office of the Chief Clerk, and the Wheeler Report. Members of the media do not complain the proceedings are hidden.

Like many of the committee members, I have heard from my local elected officials on this bill. They overwhelmingly support this bipartisan bill. Local control is a buzzword we hear in Madison. That is what this bill is about: local control. Contrary to the opponents, this bill offers more avenues for the public to read and review what is going on in their government.

Thank you for considering testimony this morning. I look forward to this bill moving forward in the legislative process.