

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2015

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HOUSE BILL 156*
Committee Substitute Favorable 3/25/15

Short Title: Legal Notices/Require Internet Publication.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 5, 2015

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO REQUIRE INTERNET WEB SITE PUBLICATION OF LEGAL NOTICES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. G.S. 1-596 reads as rewritten:

"§ 1-596. **Charges for legal advertising.**

(a) The publication of all advertising required by law to be made in newspapers in this State shall be paid for at not to exceed the local commercial rate of the newspapers selected. Any public or municipal officer or board created by or existing under the laws of this State that is now or may hereafter be authorized by law to enter into contracts for the publication of legal advertisements is hereby authorized to pay therefor prices not exceeding said rates.

No newspaper in this State shall accept or print any legal advertising until said newspaper shall have first filed with the clerk of the superior court of the county in which it is published a sworn statement of its current commercial rate for the several classes of advertising regularly carried by said publication, and any owner or manager of a newspaper violating the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

(b) When a government notice is required to be published more than once and is paid for by the governmental entity and the cost of publication is not paid in advance by or allowed to be recouped from private parties, the governmental entity may not be charged for the second and successive publications of that notice at a rate greater than eighty-five percent (85%) of the original rate.

SECTION 2. G.S. 1-597 reads as rewritten:

"§ 1-597. **Regulations for newspaper publication of legal notices, advertisements, etc.**

(a) Whenever a notice or any other paper, document or legal advertisement of any kind or description shall be authorized or required by any of the laws of the State of North Carolina, heretofore or hereafter enacted, or by any order or judgment of any court of this State to be published or advertised in a newspaper, such publication, advertisement or notice shall be of no force and effect unless it shall be published in a newspaper with a general circulation to actual paid subscribers which newspaper at the time of such publication, advertisement or notice, shall have been admitted to the United States mails in the Periodicals class in the county or political subdivision where such publication, advertisement or notice is required to be published, and which shall have been regularly and continuously issued in the county in which the publication, advertisement or notice is authorized or required to be published, at least one day in each calendar week for at least 25 of the 26 consecutive weeks immediately preceding the date of the first publication of such advertisement, publication or notice; provided that in the event that a newspaper otherwise meeting the qualifications and having the characteristics prescribed by G.S. 1-597 to 1-599, should fail for a period not exceeding four weeks in any calendar year to



1 publish one or more of its issues such newspaper shall nevertheless be deemed to have
2 complied with the requirements of regularity and continuity of publication prescribed herein.
3 Provided further, that where any city or town is located in two or more adjoining counties, any
4 newspaper published in such city or town shall, for the purposes of G.S. 1-597 to 1-599, be
5 deemed to be admitted to the mails, issued and published in all such counties in which such
6 town or city of publication is located, and every publication, advertisement or notice required to
7 be published in any such city or town or in any of the counties where such city or town is
8 located shall be valid if published in a newspaper published, issued and admitted to the mails
9 anywhere within any such city or town, regardless of whether the newspaper's plant or the post
10 office where the newspaper is admitted to the mails is in such county or not, if the newspaper
11 otherwise meets the qualifications and requirements of G.S. 1-597 to 1-599. ~~This provision
12 shall be retroactive to May 1, 1940, and all publications, advertisements and notices published
13 in accordance with this provision since May 1, 1940, are hereby validated.~~

14 Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 1-599, whenever a notice or any other paper,
15 document or legal advertisement of any kind or description shall be authorized or required by
16 any of the laws of the State of North Carolina, heretofore or hereafter enacted, or by any order
17 or judgment of any court of this State to be published or advertised in a newspaper qualified for
18 legal advertising in a county and there is no newspaper qualified for legal advertising as
19 defined in this section in such county, then it shall be deemed sufficient compliance with such
20 laws, order or judgment by publication of such notice or any other such paper, document or
21 legal advertisement of any kind or description in a newspaper published in an adjoining county
22 or in a county within the same district court district as defined in G.S. 7A-133 or superior court
23 district or set of districts as defined in G.S. 7A-41.1, as the case may be; provided, if the clerk
24 of the superior court finds as a fact that such newspaper otherwise meets the requirements of
25 this section and has a general circulation in such county where no newspaper is published
26 meeting the requirements of this section.

27 (b) Each notice must be placed on the newspaper's Internet Web site, at no additional
28 charge, on the same day that the notice appears in the newspaper. A hyperlink to legal notices
29 shall be provided on the front page of the newspaper's Internet Web site that provides access to
30 the legal notices without charge. If there is a specified size and placement required for a printed
31 legal notice, the size and placement of the notice on the newspaper's Internet Web site should
32 optimize its online visibility in keeping with the print requirement. The newspaper's Internet
33 Web site pages that contain legal notices shall present the legal notices as the dominant subject
34 matter of those pages. The newspaper's Internet Web site shall contain a search function to
35 facilitate searching legal notices.

36 (c) If a legal notice is published in the newspaper and cannot be published on the
37 newspaper's Internet Web site for any reason, the newspaper publishing the notice shall place
38 the notice on the statewide Internet Web site established and maintained as an initiative of the
39 North Carolina Press Association as a repository for such notices. A hyperlink to legal notices
40 shall be provided on the front page of the statewide North Carolina Press Association Internet
41 Web site that provides access to the legal notices without charge.

42 (d) Upon request, newspapers that publish notices shall provide electronic mail
43 notification of the legal notices when they are printed in the newspaper and added to the
44 newspaper's Internet Web site or to the statewide North Carolina Press Association Internet
45 Web site. The electronic mail notification shall be provided without charge and notification for
46 the electronic mail registry shall be available on the front page of the legal notices section of
47 the newspaper's Internet Web site. For any legal notice required to be published more than
48 once, electronic mail notification required by this subsection shall apply only to the first
49 publication of the notice.

50 (e) Any error in the placement of a government legal notice on a newspaper's Internet
51 Web site or the statewide North Carolina Press Association Internet Web site shall be

1 considered harmless error and the requirement of proper legal notice shall be deemed to have
2 been met if the government entity placing the notice also places the notice on its own Internet
3 Web site.

4 (f) Any notice required by statute to be published by a government entity shall be
5 deemed to comply with the requirement for publication if the government entity has attempted
6 to have the notice published in accordance with this Article by a newspaper of general
7 circulation and has also published the notice on its own Web site, even if the publication by a
8 newspaper of general circulation under this Article is not timely completed."

9 **SECTION 3.** The validation of any publication, advertisement, or notice pursuant
10 to a previous enactment of G.S. 1-597 remains in effect and is not affected by any
11 modifications of that statute enacted by this act.

12 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective October 1, 2015, and applies to notices
13 that must be published on or after that date, except that it does not apply to notices permitted to
14 be published on a government Internet Web site in lieu of newspaper publication pursuant to an
15 ordinance enacted before that date.