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**Testimony of Monica Nieporte**  
*Ohio News Media Association*  
Opponent – House Bill 255  
**House Ways and Means Committee**

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 255. I am here today on behalf of Ohio's daily and weekly newspapers, which provide critical information to your constituents.

As you know, HB 255 would modify public notice requirements related to publication of county delinquent property tax lists. Committee members may recall this was debated during the prior General Assembly. HB 255 would move the second publication of the delinquent property tax list to a governmental website designated by the county. While I understand the arguments from proponents, I am concerned that such a move would create problems for Ohio taxpayers.

Ohio's public notice laws are intended to guarantee citizens have as much notice as possible related to governmental actions. As it relates to the taking of personal property, this is even more essential. By placing these notices in a newspaper, we provide a credible and impartial record to taxpayers. Further, this guarantees due process and avoids creating a conflict of interest for governmental entity.

Our public notice laws have undergone several changes in recent years to address the growing movement of readership to news media websites and ensure taxpayers receive the best value and impact. In 2011, R.C. 7.16 was enacted to allow for abbreviated publication for most public notices. The result of this section was to dramatically reduce printing costs without sacrificing the frequency of notice. Under this section, any public notice with more than one required run can have the second and third, if necessary, truncated to reduce space.

Additionally, in 2014 state ONMA launched [www.publicnoticesohio.gov](http://www.publicnoticesohio.gov), a statewide website the aggregates all public notices. As part of this launch, all publications that run legal notices in Ohio post all notices to this site at no additional cost to the government advertiser. As a result of these changes, your constituents receive public notice in the local newspaper, on the local media outlet's website, and on the

statewide site. All of this is accomplished at a significant lower cost than was charged a decade ago.

Public notice is a service that my members take seriously. And it is for that reason that we are concerned with House Bill 255. HB 255 would create a new standard for how this particular public notice is handled that would run contrary to other notices required under law. This would also be the first instance of a notice moving away from the local news media to a governmental website. Given that each county can designate a different website to host this information, HB 255 will create inconsistencies across the state.

Chapter 5721 of the Revised Code, which creates this notice requirement, outlines the process by which a county can seize property from its owner. The growth of land banks in Ohio has resulted in counties more aggressively pursuing tax foreclosures. I think it is essential that property owners be given as much notice as possible before they lose their property. I can attest that publication of the delinquent property tax list works – during my time as a publisher, it was very common for the second publication of the delinquent property tax to be shorter than the first. The ability to seize property is extraordinary and I don't believe we should be lessening public notice of the exercise of this power.

In reviewing R.C. 5721.03(B), we noticed that it does not include a reference to R.C. 7.16. As a result, county auditors are unable to shorten the second publication of the delinquent property tax list. Simply adding this reference would allow counties the flexibility to truncate the second notice. This could be as simple as putting a link where the updated list can be found. Counties would realize a significant cost savings while the public would still be notified of an impending tax foreclosure.

More importantly, this keeps the notice within the news media. Between print circulation and website readership, local newspapers and their websites are the most widely viewed and trusted source for local news and information. Further, we are an impartial third party and recordkeeper in a dispute between a property owner and a county.

We will continue to work with the bill sponsor and cosponsors as well as members of this committee to address necessary changes to Ohio's public notice laws. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.