



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Assembly passes Washington Island Observer bill

MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens, R-Sturgeon Bay, is extremely pleased that the Wisconsin State Assembly has passed his bill that will benefit the Washington Island Observer and other newspapers across the state.

Under current state law, a newspaper is defined – with certain exceptions – as a publication that is printed at regular intervals and at least once per week, containing, on average, 25 percent news content per issue. A newspaper must meet that definition and the printing requirement to be considered eligible to receive payments for publishing legal notices.

Because Washington Island is only accessible by ferry and has a large number of seasonal residents and visitors who leave during the winter, the Observer only publishes about once per month during that time. However, it meets all the other criteria for being defined as an official state newspaper.

AB 112 recognizes the Washington Island Observer’s hardships and incorporates the print news outlet into the state definition of a newspaper, thereby helping them promote government transparency by ensuring the community has easier and more regular access to legal notices.

“During these difficult times when local newspapers are continually folding or downsizing to stay financially viable, my bill gives the Observer the opportunity to increase its revenue while also providing its readers with additional services to help keep them better informed,” Rep. Kitchens said.

AB 112 also embraces newer technological advancements by allowing all newspapers in Wisconsin to send out affidavits related to legal notices in either hard copy or electronic form. Under current state law, these affidavits must include a printed copy of the legal notice clipped from the newspaper and must specify the date of each insertion and the paper in which it was published.

“Now that the technology is readily available, I do not believe we should be forcing newspapers to do something that is, by and large, more costly and time-consuming,” Rep. Kitchens said. “I am proud that my bill gives newspapers the ability to choose whichever option works best for them.”

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