

From: **Molly Novotny** <info@sq.actionnetwork.org>

Date: Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 8:11 AM

Subject: Please expand electronic participation in meetings

To: <foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov>

FOIA Council,

In my non-professional life, I serve on two City boards in Falls Church and for my professional job, I routinely work with town, city and county boards on land use matters, so I write to ask you to expand the flexibility for remote participation in meetings as both a community member and professional.

With the expanded flexibility these past several months, I have seen no degradation of the open meeting process or ability for local government to do its work. Just as my office has seen our work product flourish during this pandemic -- even with all 1,700 of us working at home -- the work of local governments has continued, largely uninterrupted (following a ramp up period with technology).

I support increasing flexibility for electronic meetings outside of an emergency to allow members of those boards, councils and commissions to participate remotely and for members of the public to submit testimony remotely (which has always occurred through their ability to submit written comments). This change will actually increase participation, not stifle it, as it will open these meetings to those who may be a) uncomfortable driving after dark, b) live in remote areas with long commutes, c) don't have access to reliable transportation, d) have child care to account for, etc.

I encourage you to vote this year to remove any state-level limit for how often a member may participate electronically. Please also study in 2021 how there can be further increased flexibility for meeting electronically even when there is not an emergency.

Thank you for your consideration,
Molly Novotny

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