



## Mary Ball Washington Regional Council

### GO Virginia Region 6

406 Princess Anne Street  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

[www.govirginia6.org](http://www.govirginia6.org)

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June 22, 2021

Dear Senator Stuart, Delegate Simon, Senator Locke, Delegate Wampler, and other members of the FOIA Council:

We write to express our support for increased flexibility for electronic meetings outside of a declared emergency. Over the past 15 months, we have seen firsthand that electronic meetings have increased participation by members of the public because they remove barriers such as transportation and childcare. Removing such barriers leads to a more equitable, accessible, and transparent government and better, more representative public policy is created when residents with a diversity of voices and lived experiences are able to participate in their government, whether by attending a meeting or through direct service on a board or commission.

GO Virginia is a collaborative economic development initiative, that provides project-based incentives to encourage collaboration between private industry, higher education, and local government in each region to produce results that will grow and diversify the regional economies and ultimately the commonwealth. Region 6 works to advance this mission in the Fredericksburg area, the Northern Neck, and the Middle Peninsula (Planning Districts 16, 17, and 18).

Because Region 6 comprises such a large geographic area, travelling to monthly meetings, no matter where held in the Region, will always take upwards of two hours for some members. Other rural Regions no doubt experience similar issues. Given that the focus of GO Virginia is on spreading economic opportunity in underserved areas of the Commonwealth, it would only make sense that we would want to make attendance as easy as possible for our busy volunteer members. The Regional Council members who serve on Region 6's Council are uncompensated for their time. Even subcommittees of the council and sub-committees are unable to meet electronically. We have heard directly from council members that this increased flexibility by holding meetings virtually have helped their participation and overall growth of the region.

GO Virginia functions by awarding grants based on applications reviewed and approved at the regional level and then finalized by the State Board. Region 6 has successfully deployed \$3.9 million into the region during the last 15 months, including fostering an environment of collaboration to fund our largest and first multi region project, "Launching a Coastal Resilience and Adaptation Economy" at \$2.9 million with Hampton Roads.

Even before COVID, a majority of other states allowed public bodies to meet electronically<sup>1</sup>; some states even note that this is for the benefit of the public, as well as the public body. Given the increased participation we have seen, electronic meetings can help achieve FOIA's policy goal of promoting "an

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<sup>1</sup> These include: Alaska; Arizona; California; Colorado; Connecticut; D.C.; Hawaii; Idaho; Kansas; Kentucky; Maryland; Minnesota; Mississippi; Missouri; Montana; Nevada; New York; North Carolina; North Dakota; Oregon; Pennsylvania; South Carolina; South Dakota; Utah; Vermont; Washington; and West Virginia.



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increased awareness by all persons of government activities and affording every opportunity to citizens to witness the operations of government.”

We hope you will take the lessons we have learned over the past 15 months and help move Virginia into the 21st century. We ask you to please recommend that regional bodies and local advisory bodies be allowed to meet electronically outside of a declared emergency, while allowing or requiring the local governing body or regional body to adopt a resolution governing the use of such meetings.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. William Beale".

G. William Beale, Chair  
Mary Ball Washington Regional Council

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Quartel".

Robert Quartel, Vice Chair  
Mary Ball Washington Regional Council