

Virginia FOIA Council  
Pocahontas Building, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
900 E. Main Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

August 2, 2020

Dear Esteemed FOIA Council Members:

My name is Alyia Gaskins. I am a Commissioner on the Alexandria Transportation Commission.

I write today to express my support of HB321 and ask the FOIA Council to establish an Electronic Meetings Subcommittee. Amid all the challenges presented by COVID-19, social distancing demands we think creatively about how we engage with communities. As such, HB321 should be a baseline. I hope you will consider additional revisions to the law that will increase flexibility for electronic meetings and electronic participation, such as allowing members to participate electronically in 25% of the meetings held per calendar year.

The City of Alexandria is undergoing an extensive process to create the Alexandria Mobility Plan (AMP), which is an update of the 2008 Transportation Master Plan. The AMP is essential to ensuring that all residents, businesses, and visitors have a transportation network that serves their needs.

All communities benefit when a diversity of voices and experiences, including those who have children, aging parents, and/or travel for work, can participate. However, without robust community engagement, Alexandria will be unable to create an equitable, accessible, and just transportation network. While electronic meetings and electronic participation alone will not ensure meaningful civic participation in the AMP process, HB321 is an important step in removing barriers to civic engagement and increasing participation.

The Code already requires boards and commissions to have an approval process for allowing or denying the request to participate electronically. This requirement serves to hamper any potential excessive use or misuse of this policy.

Engaging more voices will help ensure our work is relevant, effective, and equitable. I urge the Council to act now to support and increase civic engagement in a changing and increasing virtual world.

Warmly,  
Alyia S.P. Gaskins, MPH