

I serve on the Arlington County Planning Commission as an appointed citizen commissioner. I write in support of HB321 and ask the FOIA Council to establish an Electronic Meetings Subcommittee to consider timely changes to the limitations on electronic participation in public body meetings of the Commonwealth of Virginia. COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges to maintaining Virginia's strong commitment to civic engagement and citizen participation in our local community organizations. Many of these challenges existed prior to the pandemic's immediate restrictions on in-person gatherings, but we have an opportunity now to reconsider how we engage as a community and how we can use available technology to accommodate, and even encourage, civic participation on a greater scale throughout the Commonwealth. We should embrace this opportunity to "reframe" the meaning of public meetings and increase accessibility for all Virginians—and allowing greater participation by virtual attendance is an important step towards that inclusivity. For these reasons, please consider HB321 a baseline for change, and an opportunity to revise the law to increase flexibility and electronic participation in all public meetings.

Thank you,

Sara Steinberger

Arlington County Planning Commission