

**SENATE BILL NO.** \_\_\_\_\_ **HOUSE BILL NO.** \_\_\_\_\_

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-3701, 2.2-3708, and 2.2-3708.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; electronic communication meetings; participation by electronic communication means by members of public bodies.

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That §§ 2.2-3701, 2.2-3708, and 2.2-3708.1 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 2.2-3701. Definitions.**

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Closed meeting" means a meeting from which the public is excluded.

"Electronic communication" means any audio or combined audio and visual communication method.

"Emergency" means an unforeseen circumstance rendering the notice required by this chapter impossible or impracticable and which circumstance requires immediate action.

"Information" as used in the exclusions established by §§ 2.2-3705.1 through 2.2-3705.7, means the content within a public record that references a specifically identified subject matter, and shall not be interpreted to require the production of information that is not embodied in a public record.

"Meeting" or "meetings" means the meetings including work sessions, when sitting physically, or through telephonic or video equipment pursuant to § 2.2-3708 or 2.2-3708.1, as a body or entity, or as an informal assemblage of (i) as many as three members or (ii) a quorum, if less than three, of the constituent membership, wherever

held, with or without minutes being taken, whether or not votes are cast, of any public body. Neither the gathering of employees of a public body nor the gathering or attendance of two or more members of a public body (i) at any place or function where no part of the purpose of such gathering or attendance is the discussion or transaction of any public business, and such gathering or attendance was not called or prearranged with any purpose of discussing or transacting any business of the public body, or (ii) at a public forum, candidate appearance, or debate, the purpose of which is to inform the electorate and not to transact public business or to hold discussions relating to the transaction of public business, even though the performance of the members individually or collectively in the conduct of public business may be a topic of discussion or debate at such public meeting, shall be deemed a "meeting" subject to the provisions of this chapter.

"Open meeting" or "public meeting" means a meeting at which the public may be present.

"Public body" means any legislative body, authority, board, bureau, commission, district or agency of the Commonwealth or of any political subdivision of the Commonwealth, including cities, towns and counties, municipal councils, governing bodies of counties, school boards and planning commissions; boards of visitors of public institutions of higher education; and other organizations, corporations or agencies in the Commonwealth supported wholly or principally by public funds. It shall include (i) the Virginia Birth-Related Neurological Injury Compensation Program and its board of directors established pursuant to Chapter 50 (§ 38.2-5000 et seq.) of Title 38.2 and (ii) any committee, subcommittee, or other entity however designated, of the public body created to perform delegated functions of the public body or to advise the public body. It shall not exclude any such committee, subcommittee or entity because it has private sector or citizen members. Corporations organized by the Virginia Retirement System are "public bodies" for purposes of this chapter.

For the purposes of the provisions of this chapter applicable to access to public records, constitutional officers and private police departments as defined in § 9.1-101 shall be considered public bodies and, except as otherwise expressly provided by law, shall have the same obligations to disclose public records as other custodians of public records.

"Public records" means all writings and recordings that consist of letters, words or numbers, or their equivalent, set down by handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photography, magnetic impulse, optical or magneto-optical form, mechanical or electronic recording or other form of data compilation, however stored, and regardless of physical form or characteristics, prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. Records that are not prepared for or used in the transaction of public business are not public records.

"Regional public body" means a unit of government organized as provided by law within defined boundaries, as determined by the General Assembly, ~~whose members are appointed by the participating local governing bodies, and such~~ which unit includes two or more ~~counties or cities~~ localities.

"Scholastic records" means those records containing information directly related to a student or an applicant for admission and maintained by a public body that is an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution.

**§ 2.2-3708. Electronic communication meetings; applicability; physical quorum required; exceptions; notice; report.**

A. Except as expressly provided in subsection G of this section or § 2.2-3708.1, no local governing body, school board, or any authority, board, bureau, commission, district or agency of local government, any committee thereof, or any entity created by a local governing body, school board, or any local authority, board, or commission shall conduct a meeting wherein the public business is discussed or transacted through

telephonic, video, electronic or other communication means where the members are not physically assembled. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the use of interactive audio or video means to expand public participation.

B. Except as provided in subsection G or H of this section or subsection D of § 2.2-3707.01, state public bodies may conduct any meeting wherein the public business is discussed or transacted through electronic communication means, provided (i) a quorum of the public body is physically assembled at one primary or central meeting location, (ii) notice of the meeting has been given in accordance with subsection C, and (iii) the remote locations, from which additional members of the public body participate through electronic communication means, are open to the public. All persons attending the meeting at any of the meeting locations shall be afforded the same opportunity to address the public body as persons attending the primary or central location.

If an authorized public body holds an electronic meeting pursuant to this section, it shall also hold at least one meeting annually where members in attendance at the meeting are physically assembled at one location and where no members participate by electronic communication means.

C. Notice of any ~~meetings~~ regular meeting held pursuant to this section shall be provided at least three working days in advance of the date scheduled for the meeting. Notice, reasonable under the circumstance, of special, emergency, or continued meetings held pursuant to this section shall be given contemporaneously with the notice provided to members of the public body conducting the meeting. For the purposes of this subsection, "continued meeting" means a meeting that is continued to address an emergency or to conclude the agenda of a meeting for which proper notice was given.

The notice shall include the date, time, place, and purpose for the meeting; shall identify the locations for the meeting; and shall include a telephone number that may be used at remote locations to notify the primary or central meeting location of any interruption in the telephonic or video broadcast of the meeting to the remote locations.

Any interruption in the telephonic or video broadcast of the meeting shall result in the suspension of action at the meeting until repairs are made and public access restored.

D. Agenda packets and, unless exempt, all materials that will be distributed to members of the public body and that have been made available to the staff of the public body in sufficient time for duplication and forwarding to all locations where public access will be provided shall be made available to the public at the time of the meeting. Minutes of all meetings held by electronic communication means shall be recorded as required by § 2.2-3707. Votes taken during any meeting conducted through electronic communication means shall be recorded by name in roll-call fashion and included in the minutes.

E. Three working days' notice shall not be required for meetings authorized under this section held in accordance with subsection G ~~or that are continued to address an emergency or to conclude the agenda of the meeting for which proper notice has been given, when the date, time, place, and purpose of the continued meeting are set during the meeting prior to adjournment.~~ Public bodies conducting emergency meetings through electronic communication means shall comply with the provisions of subsection D requiring minutes of the meeting. The nature of the emergency shall be stated in the minutes.

F. Any authorized public body that meets by electronic communication means shall make a written report of the following to the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council ~~and the Joint Commission on Technology and Science~~ by December 15 of each year:

1. The total number of electronic communication meetings held that year;
2. The dates and purposes of the meetings;
3. A copy of the agenda for the meeting;
4. The number of sites for each meeting;

5. The types of electronic communication means by which the meetings were held;

6. The number of participants, including members of the public, at each meeting location;

7. The identity of the members of the public body recorded as absent and those recorded as present at each meeting location;

8. A summary of any public comment received about the electronic communication meetings; and

9. A written summary of the public body's experience using electronic communication meetings, including its logistical and technical experience.

In addition, any authorized public body shall make available to the public at any meeting conducted in accordance with this section a public comment form prepared by the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council in accordance with § 30-179.

G. Any public body may meet by electronic communication means without a quorum of the public body physically assembled at one location when the Governor has declared a state of emergency in accordance with § 44-146.17, provided that (i) the catastrophic nature of the declared emergency makes it impracticable or unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location and (ii) the purpose of the meeting is to address the emergency. The public body convening a meeting in accordance with this subsection shall (a) give public notice using the best available method given the nature of the emergency, which notice shall be given contemporaneously with the notice provided members of the public body conducting the meeting; (b) make arrangements for public access to such meeting; and (c) otherwise comply with the provisions of this section. The nature of the emergency, the fact that the meeting was held by electronic communication means, and the type of electronic communication means by which the meeting was held shall be stated in the minutes.

~~H. [Expired].~~

**§ 2.2-3708.1. Remote participation in meetings due to personal matter, certain disabilities, or distance from meeting location for certain public bodies.**

A. A member of a public body may participate in a meeting governed by this chapter through electronic communication means from a remote location that is not open to the public only as follows and subject to the requirements of subsection B:

1. If, on or before the day of a meeting, a member of the public body holding the meeting notifies the chair of the public body that such member is unable to attend the meeting due to ~~an emergency or a~~ personal matter and identifies with specificity the nature of the ~~emergency or~~ personal matter, and the public body holding the meeting records in its minutes the specific nature of the ~~emergency or~~ personal matter and the remote location from which the member participated. If a member's participation from a remote location is disapproved because such participation would violate the policy adopted pursuant to subsection B, such disapproval shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

Such participation by the member shall be limited each calendar year to two meetings ~~or 25 percent of the meetings of the public body, whichever is fewer;~~

2. If a member of a public body notifies the chair of the public body that such member is unable to attend a meeting due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevents the member's physical attendance and the public body records this fact and the remote location from which the member participated in its minutes; or

3. If, on the day of a meeting, a member of a regional public body notifies the chair of the public body that such member's principal residence is more than 60 miles from the meeting location identified in the required notice for such meeting and the public body holding the meeting records in its minutes the remote location from which the member participated. If a member's participation from a remote location is

disapproved because such participation would violate the policy adopted pursuant to subsection B, such disapproval shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

B. Participation by a member of a public body as authorized under subsection A shall be only under the following conditions:

1. The public body has adopted a written policy allowing for and governing participation of its members by electronic communication means, including an approval process for such participation, subject to the express limitations imposed by this section. Once adopted, the policy shall be applied strictly and uniformly, without exception, to the entire membership and without regard to the identity of the member requesting remote participation or the matters that will be considered or voted on at the meeting;

2. A quorum of the public body is physically assembled at the primary or central meeting location; and

3. The public body makes arrangements for the voice of the remote participant to be heard by all persons at the primary or central meeting location.

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