

Dear Members of the FOIA Council- Electronic Meetings Subcommittee,
I respectfully would like to submit the two attache documents as a starting point as you begin the discussion of amending § 2.2-3708.2, allowing public bodies to hold electronic meetings during a health pandemic.

The first document is language submitted to the Governor in April 2020 for inclusion in the budget, allowing specifically for meetings to be held electronically when it was deemed unsafe to have an in-person quorum. A broad group of stakeholders, including open government advocates, local government bodies associations and regional public bodies collaborated on this bill draft.

The second document is the language that was actually included in the budget adopted by the General Assembly in April 2020 and then amended again during the 2021 special session with the language in italics (not yet approved by the Governor). As you can see in this version, there was additional language regarding common interest community associations that likely needs to be moved into its own section of the Code as we move forward, which I believe is their intent.

Thank you for your time and your attention to the matter of amending the Code of Virginia to properly incorporate the process for holding electronic public meetings during a Gubernatorial declared health emergency.

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18. That § 2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 2.2-3708.2. Meetings held through electronic communication means.

A. The following provisions apply to all public bodies:

1. Subject to the requirements of subsection C, all public bodies may conduct any meeting wherein the public business is discussed or transacted through electronic communication means 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:

- a. Such member is unable to attend the meeting due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevents the member's physical attendance; or
- b. Such member is unable to attend the meeting due to a personal matter and identifies with specificity the nature of the personal matter. Participation by a member pursuant to this subdivision is limited each calendar year to two meetings.

2. If participation by a member through electronic communication means is approved pursuant to subdivision 1, the public body holding the meeting shall record in its minutes the remote location from which the member participated; however, the remote location need not be open to the public. If participation is approved pursuant to subdivision 1 a, the public body shall also include in its minutes the fact that the member participated through electronic communication means due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevented the member's physical attendance. If participation is approved pursuant to subdivision 1 b, the public body shall also include in its minutes the specific nature of the personal matter cited by the member.

If a member's participation from a remote location pursuant to subdivision 1 b is disapproved because such participation would violate the policy adopted pursuant to subsection C, such disapproval shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

3. 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. When the declaration of emergency continues, or is projected to continue, for thirty (30) calendar days or longer, making it impracticable or unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location, a public body may meet by electronic communication means without a quorum physically assembled at one location for the purpose of discussing and transacting the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the public body and the discharge of its lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities, only for the duration of the emergency declared pursuant to § 44-146.17.

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The public body convening a meeting in accordance with this subdivision 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 to members of the public body conducting the meeting;
- b. Make arrangements for public access to such meeting, *through electronic means including, to the extent practicable, videoconferencing technology*; 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.

B. The following provisions apply to regional public bodies:

1. Subject to the requirements in subsection C, regional public bodies may also conduct any meeting wherein the public business is discussed or transacted through electronic communication means 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.
2. If participation by a member through electronic communication means is approved pursuant to this subsection, the public body holding the meeting shall record in its minutes the remote location from which the member participated; however, the remote location need not be open to the public.

If a member's participation from a remote location is disapproved because such participation would violate the policy adopted pursuant to subsection C, such disapproval shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

C. Participation by a member of a public body in a meeting through electronic communication means pursuant to subdivisions A 1 and 2 and subsection B shall be authorized only if the following conditions are met:

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 one primary or central meeting location; and

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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.

D. The following provisions apply to state public bodies:

1. Except as provided in subsection D of § 2.2-3707.01, state public bodies may also conduct any meeting wherein the public business is discussed or transacted through electronic communication means, provided that (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 subdivision 2, and (iii) members of the public are provided a substantially equivalent electronic communication means through which to witness the meeting. For the purposes of this subsection, "witness" means observe or listen.

If a state public body holds a meeting through electronic communication means pursuant to this subsection, 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.

2. Notice of any regular meeting held pursuant to this subsection 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 primary or central meeting location and any remote locations that are open to the public pursuant to subdivision 4; shall include notice as to the electronic communication means by which members of the public may witness the meeting; and shall include a telephone number that may be used to notify the primary or central meeting location of any interruption in the telephonic or video broadcast of the meeting. 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 is restored.

3. A copy of the proposed agenda and agenda packets and, unless exempt, all materials that will be distributed to members of a public body for a meeting shall be made available for public inspection at the same time such documents are furnished to the members of the public body conducting the meeting.

4. Public access to the remote locations from which additional members of the public body participate through electronic communication means shall be encouraged but not required. However, if three or more members are gathered at the same remote location, then such remote location shall be open to the public.

5. If access to remote locations is afforded, (i) all persons attending the meeting at any of the remote locations shall be afforded the same opportunity to address the public body as persons attending at the

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primary or central location and (ii) a copy of the proposed agenda and agenda packets and, unless exempt, all materials that will be distributed to members of the public body for the meeting shall be made available for inspection by members of the public attending the meeting at any of the remote locations at the time of the meeting.

6. The public body shall make available to the public at any meeting conducted in accordance with this subsection a public comment form prepared by the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council in accordance with § 30-179.

7. 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. For emergency meetings held by electronic communication means, the nature of the emergency shall be stated in the minutes.

8. Any authorized state public body that meets by electronic communication means pursuant to this subsection shall make a written report of the following to the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council by December 15 of each year:

a. The total number of meetings held that year in which there was participation through electronic communication means;

b. The dates and purposes of each such meeting;

c. A copy of the agenda for each such meeting;

d. The primary or central meeting location of each such meeting;

e. The types of electronic communication means by which each meeting was held;

f. If possible, the number of members of the public who witnessed each meeting through electronic communication means;

g. The identity of the members of the public body recorded as present at each meeting, and whether each member was present at the primary or central meeting location or participated through electronic communication means;

h. The identity of any members of the public body who were recorded as absent at each meeting and any members who were recorded as absent at a meeting but who monitored the meeting through electronic communication means;

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i. If members of the public were granted access to a remote location from which a member participated in a meeting through electronic communication means, the number of members of the public at each such remote location;

j. A summary of any public comment received about the process of conducting a meeting through electronic communication means; and

k. A written summary of the public body's experience conducting meetings through electronic communication means, including its logistical and technical experience.

E. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the use of interactive audio or video means to expand public participation.

~~18.~~ **19.** That the provisions of the first, second and fifth enactments of this act shall expire at midnight on June 30, 2020. **That the provision of the eighteenth amendment of this act shall expire at midnight on June 30, 2021.** The provisions of the third, fourth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, **and seventeenth** enactments shall have no expiration date.

Budget ITEM 4-0.01#1c

Operating Policies: Allow policy-making boards to meet virtually during emergency declarations

Language:

Page 578, after line 26, insert:

"g. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any public body, including any state, local, regional, or regulatory body, or a governing board as defined in § 54.1-2345 of the Code of Virginia, *or any joint meeting of such entities*, may meet by electronic communication means without a quorum of the public body or any member of the governing board physically assembled at one location when the Governor has declared a state of emergency in accordance with § 44-146.17, provided that (i) the nature of the declared emergency makes it impracticable or unsafe for the public body or governing board to assemble in a single location; (ii) the purpose of meeting is to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the public body or common interest community association as defined in § 54.1-2345 of the Code of Virginia and the discharge of its lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities; (iii) a public body shall make available a recording or transcript of the meeting on its website in accordance with the timeframes established in §§ 2.2-3707 and 2.2-3707.1 of the Code of Virginia; and (iv) the governing board shall distribute minutes of a meeting held pursuant to this subdivision to common interest community association members by the same method used to provide notice of the meeting.

A public body or governing board convening a meeting in accordance with this subdivision shall:

1. Give notice to the public or common interest community association members using the best available method given the nature of the emergency, which notice shall be given contemporaneously with the notice provided to members of the public body or governing board conducting the meeting;
2. Make arrangements for public access or common interest community association members access to such meeting through electronic means including, to the extent practicable, videoconferencing technology. If the means of communication allows, provide the public or common interest community association members with an opportunity to comment; and
3. Public bodies must otherwise comply with the provisions of § 2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia.

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 of the public body or governing board."

Explanation:

(This amendment provides authority for public bodies, including agencies, boards, and common interest communities to conduct electronic meetings during a declared state of emergency when it is impracticable or unsafe to assemble a quorum in a single location.)