



**ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA**  
**OFFICE OF THE COUNTY BOARD**

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KENDRA JACOBS  
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**MEMBERS**  
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CHAIR

KATIE CRISTOL  
MATT DE FERRANTI  
CHRISTIAN DORSEY

Dear Mr. Coleburn, Mr. Conrad, Mr. Potter, Mr. Rives, Mr. Seltzer, Mr. Stern, and Mr. Wade,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding your study of House Bill 321, and to signal my strong support for removing Commonwealth-imposed limits on how often members of public bodies may participate electronically, in favor of locally- or regionally- determined limits.

At previous hearings, my colleagues on regional bodies, such as the Virginia Railway Express Operations Board and the Virginia Municipal League, as well as my fellow elected officials and residents, have encouraged you to endorse reforms that would empower local communities and public bodies to determine the appropriate limits on electronic participation. Others have provided a compelling legal and policy basis for recommending these changes. I write to support their comments and to add my personal experience.

I am a member of the Arlington County Board and a mother. Last year, we welcomed our son two months prematurely in early March, just as the County Board began deliberations on Arlington's FY20 budget. Participating in person was not feasible during his monthlong stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. During those weeks, the County Board held not just our regular meetings but also budget work sessions on important departmental issues multiple times a week. I quickly made use of the two virtual participation opportunities afforded for "personal matters" in the Code of Virginia, and for the rest of that month found myself frustratedly emailing questions to my colleagues to pose in these sessions, watching the livestream of the meetings and taking note of areas that needed follow-up commentary that I couldn't offer in real time.

I don't believe that the public interest of my community was served by having one of its five County Board members sidelined, prevented from asking questions and barred from participating in the study of the budget by a prohibition on her virtual participation in the state code.

I *do* believe that my community, like other communities, is served by having parents and women in elected and appointed office. Across Virginia, parents are managing the needs of children, and family members are juggling the care of aging loved ones and loved ones living with disabilities. Local and regional bodies, both elected and appointed, are better when they represent these diverse perspectives. I encourage you to empower our communities to make public service more accessible for all Virginians, and to achieve more representative, effective public policy as a result.

Thank you for your time and service.

Sincerely,