

From: **Micky Ogburn** <mickyogburn1@gmail.com>
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Subject: Public Comment on Virtual meeting limits
To: <foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov>

I am a member of the Henrico County School Board. I wholeheartedly support the effort to reduce the limits on electronic meeting participation outside of a state of emergency. I have first hand experience that allowing electronic participation has increased the participation of my constituents, Henrico County Schools stakeholders and students. During the pandemic, I was able to meet with groups from all over Henrico County. It has become the norm and everyone says- can we just Zoom?

I was recently in a virtual meeting with parents from one of my Middle Schools. The meeting was arranged so that the parents could participate during their lunch hour at work. They expressed appreciation for the format that allowed them to stay at work, not worry about transportation, and not spend time driving to a meeting. They would not have had the time to meet with me otherwise in the evening due to childcare concerns and transportation issues.

We are all attempting to make ourselves more accessible to the public and trying to make it possible for more people to be involved in our committee work. The current limitation on virtual meetings will undo all of that work. Our School Board committees were not able to meet for many months until a large enough room was found so that there could be a quorum in person and the rest of the committee members were virtual. Even the in person members were uncomfortable meeting, but they did it so that they could do the work that needed to be done.

I also serve on the Maggie Walker Regional School Board. We have members who drive for 1 1/2 hours each way to participate in a 30 minute meeting. That needs to change.

We have all spent the last 16 months getting used to and purchasing the equipment needed to participate in meetings electronically. It is time for the FOIA laws to catch up to the real world in which we now live and that world is virtual.

The public holds us accountable. They will continue to do that whether it is virtual, in writing, in person, or on the phone.

Micky Ogburn
Henrico County School Board