

From: **Letty Hardi** <lhardi@fallschurchva.gov>
Date: Mon, Aug 3, 2020 at 11:55 PM
Subject: Support Electronic Participation
To: foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov <foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov>

Dear Esteemed FOIA Council Members,

I write today in support of modernizing the rules around electronic participation for meetings of public bodies. As it stands, the section allows members of a public body to participate in electronically with advance notice, but limited to two meetings per calendar year. This policy applies to our elected bodies in the City of Falls Church, as well as our volunteer boards and commissions, where I have served as a member of the City Council the past five years.

As a working parent with young children, aging parents, and other responsibilities and representing the large number of citizens in Falls Church with similar life circumstances – I encourage more flexibility in electronic participation. I would like to welcome more citizens, from a variety of backgrounds and experiences that better represent our population, to contribute to civic life. However, traditional government meetings requiring in person participation limits the pool of citizens to those with financial and childcare security to run for public office, volunteer on a board, or provide public comment in person. With our City Council meeting weekly for 48 out of 52 weeks out of the year, not including our committees and sub committees, by only allowing two electronic participations per year, that is less than 5% of our meetings. I support the flexibility in last year's bill HB321 that would have allowed two meetings per year or 10% of the meetings, whichever is greater, which would still limit any misuse of the policy.

One of the few positives to come from the COVID-19 pandemic is how quickly local governments have transitioned to virtual public meetings that maintained transparency and accessibility. In Falls Church, we have now have four months of evidence that electronic participation by members can be just as effective in conducting the people's business in person.

I encourage you to modernize the policy to support greater civic engagement and remove the barriers to more diverse voices in local government.

Best,
Letty Hardi

Letty Hardi
Falls Church City Council Member