



October 1, 2021

Sent via email

Cullen D. Seltzer, Attorney  
Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council  
Meetings Subcommittee Chair  
Sands Anderson PC  
PO Box 1998  
Richmond, VA 23218-1998

Dear Mr. Seltzer:

I am writing in support of the request by the City of Alexandria for more flexibility in regards to holding electronic meetings outside of an emergency. I serve as the Executive Director of the Southside Planning District Commission (PDC13). PDC13 represents the 80,190 constituents of Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg Counties.

Because of the rural nature of Southside Virginia, our Commissioners are frequently outside of the 60-mile allowance for electronic participation more than twice per year or 25% of our meetings due to business and personal obligations. Under a non-emergency status, these Commissioners are limited to participating electronically only twice per year. I support following the lead of other states by removing restrictions to the number of meetings that can be held electronically. If the subcommittee determines that a numeric restriction must remain, I recommend the allowance be increased to 50%.

Additionally, I support allowing board, council, authority, and commission members to vote on necessary actions in electronic meetings under non-emergency circumstances. Continued restrictions on voting only serves to confine the routine operations of rural entities by disregarding the employment and personal needs of those appointed to serve.

With the availability of real-time electronic conferencing or video services, meetings can be held electronically and still meet the requirements of "Open Meetings". In fact, video streaming of meetings ultimately allows greater participation by the public, especially when the public is spread over 2,000 square miles – a distance slightly larger than the state of Delaware.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting State of Emergency stands as proof that business can be conducted efficiently and effectively using electronic means.

Thank you and the Meetings Subcommittee for taking up this matter and hearing the voices of those who serve our fellow Virginians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah B. Gosney".

Deborah B. Gosney  
Executive Director

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