

On Tue, Oct 31, 2023 at 8:56 AM Joan Porte <president@lwv-va.org> wrote:

October 31, 2023

To: foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov

Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council

Re: Expansion of Electronic Meeting Authority

The League of Women Voters of Virginia urges the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council to support legislation facilitating the ability of local advisory and regional bodies, and state advisory councils to hold all-virtual meetings. A well-informed citizenry is key to the stability and growth of Democracy. It is imperative that all of the workings of government, including meetings and their records, be accessible to the public.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that was founded one hundred three years ago by leaders of the women's suffragist movement. We are an issue-focused, activist, and grassroots organization that believes voters must play a critical role in our democracy. Since 1920, the League has worked to deliver on our mission to empower voters and defend democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA) supported HB2050 and SB135, Virginia Freedom of Information Act; electronic meetings; local and regional public bodies, introduced in the 2023 session. These bills would have increased flexibility for local advisory and regional bodies to hold all-virtual meetings, while retaining guardrails and guidelines to ensure public access.

While these bills applied only to local and regional public bodies, we encourage the expansion of this transparency to state advisory councils. These boards are uncompensated. Expecting members to be able to travel across the Commonwealth to attend meetings is unrealistic and limits who can serve on these bodies.

In addition, not allowing these meetings to be held virtually limits participation from people with disabilities, parents with small children, people who do not or cannot drive and people who have difficult work schedules. We support the removal of the quorum and voting requirements for individual remote participation. Virtual members are as "present" as in person members.

Virtual meetings also allow regular citizens to learn more about how these public bodies operate and provide an avenue for further understanding and participation. There is nothing better for freedom than an informed citizenry.

The LWV-VA supports these measures and encourages allowing all state and local public bodies to hold virtual or hybrid meetings.

Thank you

Joan Porte

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