

AN ACT TO MODERNIZE PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

H.3152 & S.2082 | Rep. Denise Garlick & Sen. Jason Lewis

IN 2020, REMOTE ACCESS BECAME THE NEW NORMAL

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 12, 2020, Governor Baker issued an Executive Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law to enable public bodies to carry out their responsibilities while adhering to public health recommendations. The order exempts public bodies from a statutory requirement that meetings be held in a public place that is physically accessible, as long as they provide alternative means of access.

REMOTE ACCESS = EQUITABLE ACCESS

In many communities across the state, the Executive Order has significantly increased public participation in local government. It has opened new doors to our democratic process by removing barriers that predated the pandemic.

- People are more likely to be civically engaged if they are able to participate in public meetings via the internet.
- Remote access removes longstanding barriers to participation for residents with disabilities, seniors, people with limited access to transportation, and people with work and family obligations that otherwise prevent them from spending hours at municipal buildings.
- When the pandemic is over, access to public meetings should never again hinge on a person's physical mobility, or their ability to afford a car, get time off work, or find a care provider.



NOW LET'S BUILD ON OUR SUCCESS

Now that we've seen the benefits of remote access to public meetings, we can't go back. This bill will update the Open Meeting law and make the alternative means of access provisions of the Executive Order permanent.

- Ensure that all public meetings include "adequate, alternative means of public access" at no cost, to enable residents to remotely follow the meeting in real time and participate where public participation is permitted.
- Allow an economic hardship waiver for municipal bodies unable to provide real-time remote public access.

ACLU
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