

AN ACT TO MODERNIZE PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

H.3040 & S.2024 | Rep. Denise Garlick & Sen. Jason Lewis

THE FUTURE OF THE OPEN MEETING LAW

Since early 2020, the Legislature has suspended the Open Meeting Law's in-person meeting requirement, enabling public bodies to carry out their responsibilities in person, remotely, or in a hybrid manner – simultaneously expanding access for members of the public. As good government practices have evolved, many public bodies have combined the best of old and new, offering members of the public both in-person and remote attendance options. This has been transformative for people who were previously excluded from local democracy – particularly people with disabilities, caregiving responsibilities, and limited transportation.

Now is the time for permanent reforms to expand public participation in government meetings. *An Act to Modernize Participation in Public Meetings* will increase access to open meetings for everyone by embracing hybrid meetings and guaranteeing the ability to attend meetings in person or remotely.

HYBRID MEETINGS BUILD ON TRADITION & MAXIMIZE ACCESS

Hybrid public meetings build on the Commonwealth's proud tradition of participatory democracy by removing long-standing barriers to participation for residents with disabilities, seniors, people with limited access to transportation, and people with work and family obligations that prevent them from getting to and spending hours at municipal buildings. At the same time, hybrid meetings ensure continued access for people with limited access to or comfort with digital technology.

Meetings conducted exclusively in person or exclusively online needlessly shut out some people from civic engagement. It's time for the Open Meeting Law to maximize equitable access for all.

FEASIBLE, AFFORDABLE & FINANCED

An Act to Modernize Participation in Public Meetings will give municipalities more than five years to phase in hybrid meetings and help them finance required changes.

This legislation will:

- Phase in hybrid meetings, prioritizing state agencies and elected municipal bodies
- Allow economic hardship waivers for non-elected bodies
- Create a Municipal Hybrid Meeting Trust Fund and a grant program to help municipalities finance their modernization efforts.
- Require universal compliance by 2030
- We can't go backward. Let's guarantee the opportunity for all Massachusetts residents to participate in their government.



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