

VLCT Public Statement on Passage of S.55 - Changes to Open Meeting Law

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by Ted Brady, Executive Director, VLCT

The COVID-era law allowing public bodies to have fully-remote public meetings increased public participation and made serving in local government easier. VLCT wanted to keep the fully-remote option while others wanted to return to pre-pandemic rules or require every public meeting to be hybrid – something many towns don't have the capacity to do. S.55, a true compromise bill, will allow some local public bodies to meet fully remotely, and others must now meet in a hybrid (in-person and remote) fashion.

We support the concept of finding a middle ground between our position and that of those who want to go back to pre-pandemic rules. However, the legislature failed to address a few concerns VLCT raised in the final bill:?

- Communication Union Districts and state public bodies can continue meeting remotely through the end of the year, while requiring everyone else to start following the new requirements on July 1.
- The bill creates a new recording and posting requirement for most meetings of public bodies.?
- The bill creates a new training requirement for all chairs, town managers, and mayors, the second new training requirement for municipal officials this session. It also charges the Secretary of State with conducting the training.
- It requires municipalities to post Vermont's Open Meeting law and how to file complaints about violations on their website. While VLCT doesn't oppose this requirement, we don't understand why municipalities are the only public bodies subject to this requirement. It should apply to all public bodies.?

Despite these concerns, VLCT supports enacting S.55, and we will do our best to work with the legislature to address our concerns next year.

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